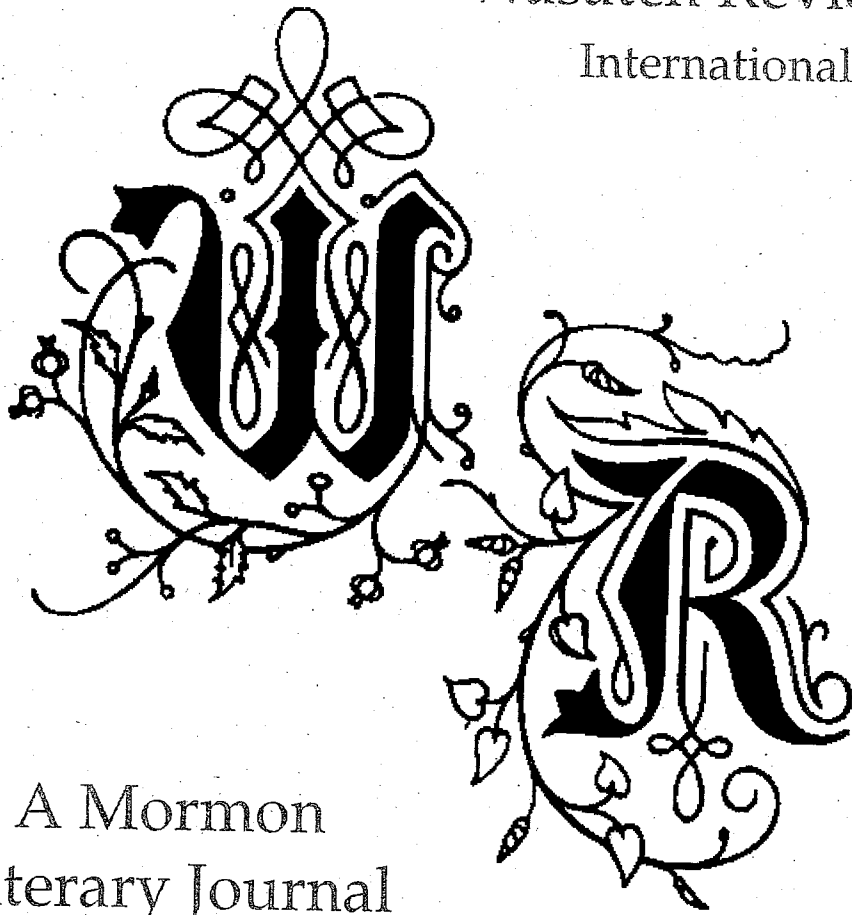


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Wasatch Review
International



A Mormon
Literary Journal

WASATCH REVIEW
INTERNATIONAL

SHORT STORIES PERSONAL ESSAYS POETRY

Eugene England • Michael Fillerup • Wayne Jorgensen
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The *Wasatch Review International* is a biannual literary journal dedicated to creative writing. Contributions from authors of any religion are welcome. Manuscripts (short stories, poetry, personal essays, drama, book reviews) must in some way explore the Mormon culture. Our aim is fine literature—not religious politics—and manuscripts should not be written to prove or disprove Church policies or doctrines.

Manuscripts should not exceed eight thousand words in length. Manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced, and preferably be available on IBM floppy disk (WordPerfect). Each manuscript should be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. Those whose manuscripts are printed will receive two contributor's copies upon publication. Send manuscripts to *Wasatch Review International*, P.O. Box 1017, Orem, UT 84059.

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Many years ago, in the days of Ernest L. Wilkinson, Clinton F. Larson attempted to start a journal entitled *Wasatch Review*. For whatever reason—perhaps it just wasn't time yet—the *Wasatch Review* was aborted and *BYU Studies*, a fine academic journal, took its place. Well, Professor Larson, the *Wasatch Review* has been born again and this time may it grow to maturity while helping its readers do the same.

We would like to acknowledge Eugene England, the Polatis's, and our illustrators. Eugene England is a man you can disagree with and still love. He was our strongest believer (he consummated belief by action) when the *Wasatch Review* was still just an idea. Thank you, Gene.

The Polatis's of Polatis Farms in Idaho gave a generous contribution that put us over the top and relieved a large amount of stress. Your contribution has made many lives better.

Our illustrators, Wayne Andreason, Will Terry, James Freeman, and Quentin Webb, add class to whatever they touch. Thanks for touching our first issue.

And of course we would like to acknowledge each and every subscriber for having the faith to put out money for something that did not yet exist. We trust your faith has created something that can make a difference for good in the world.

Great manuscripts are already coming in for the next issue, and we are looking forward to more. We'll be back in December.

CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

IN SEARCH OF WHOLENESS

Tory C. Anderson 1

PERSONAL ESSAYS

THE DAWNING OF A BRIGHTER DAY:
MORMON LITERATURE AFTER 150 YEARS
Eugene England 5

COMPANIONSHIP
Valerie Holladay 63

GERMANY (1947-48):
THE MATURING OF AN IMAGINATION
Douglas Thayer 78

SHORT STORIES

TWO YEARS SUNDAY
Wayne Jorgensen 25

THE CONVEYOR
Harlow Clark 39

NOVEL EXCERPT

"NANCY" FROM A RIVER, A ROCK
Michael Fillerup 44

POETRY

PILING CORDS
William Powley 22

BRAND
Dixie Partridge 37

WHERE THE WATER COMES OUT OF THE MOUNTAIN
Philip White 42

WEST
Philip White 42

POETRY CONT.

WHAT THE MAGDALENE SAW
Timothy Liu 43

TATTOO
K. Randall Kimball 60

THE DIONYSIAN HIEARCHY FIRST NOTICES
MORONI AND HIS FRIENDS
Michael Collins 61

PRIMA VERA
Michael Collins 61

HURRICANE MID-ATLANTIC
Sally Taylor 77

STRANGERS
Donnell Hunter 94

THE SECOND TIME
Donnell Hunter 94

WELFARE FARM RAISINS
Brian J. Fogg 95

BOOK REVEIWS

HEALING THE STREAMS:
A REVIEW OF SALVADOR BY MARGARET YOUNG
Karla and John Bennion 96

A NEW VOICE: A REVIEW OF *THOUGHTS ON A
GRASSHOPPER* BY LOUISE PLUMMER
Valerie Holladay 99

CRITICISM TO GUIDE OUR SHAKESPEARES AND
MILTONS: A REVIEW OF *TALENTS AND TECHNICIANS:
LITERARY CHIC AND THE NEW ASSEMBLY LINE FICTION*
BY JOHN W. ALDRIDGE
Mark Edward Koltko 102

A letter from the editor

In Search of Wholeness

by

Tory C. Anderson

For the first twenty-eight years of my life, when the subject came up, I would tell people that I came from an ideal LDS home. I told them this because it seemed to be the truth. I had a mother and a father who loved me and each other. I had two brothers and two sisters with whom I learned to share, to love, to hurt, to forgive. Mother cooked dinner. Dad led us in family home evenings and family prayer. We participated in the Indian Placement Program. Everyone in my family, excluding my mother (she joined the Church just before marrying my father) went on a mission. Each of my brothers and sisters (myself included) followed my parents' example and married in a temple of the Lord. Our original number of seven family members has turned into seventeen. That's seventeen Latter-day Saints; seventeen future gods and goddesses; seventeen individuals sealed together for eternity. That seems pretty ideal to me.

All of the above facts are still true today, so technically I can still say I came from an ideal LDS family. Yet, two years ago, while working my way through a masters program at BYU, I was reminiscing about the wonderful family life that gave me such a head start in the world. I recalled all the good things I have already mentioned, but in addition I remembered the suicide attempt of one family member, the divorce of my parents, the near nervous breakdown of another family member, as well as other things. I don't bring up suicide attempts, divorce, and nervous breakdowns to shock anyone. I believe these things are all too common to give much shock. My point is that I honestly thought I came from the ideal Mormon family. For a long time it never occurred to me that suicide attempts, divorce, and nervous breakdowns in the family might suggest to others that our family life was less than ideal.

It never occurred to me because I never thought about those negative events. Today I believe I never thought about them because of a tendency in our culture to repress the negative. We call repressing the negative "looking on the bright side of things."

While growing up I took in a steady diet of science fiction and Church literature. Science fiction was great for my imagination, but it was the Church literature that formed my philosophy of life. It led me to be success oriented and constantly looking for faith promoting experiences. What the literature I read didn't prepare me for was flunking advanced algebra in high school—twice. And that was after doing everything I could do to pass it including fasting and prayer. (I finally passed it in college in a home study course.) It didn't prepare me for the guilt and stress I felt on my mission. It didn't prepare me for the humiliation I felt after speaking up in an Air Force classroom where the instructor was leading a discussion on some of the "wonderfully" vulgar things that went on in some of the local nightclubs. It was made clear I was out of line. The literature I had studied was so positive and I read it so literally that I ignored the other side of my life that was just as real. Consequently, I was only half a person and ill prepared for the real world.

It is possible at this point that I may be misunderstood as saying we need to repress the positive and emphasize the negative. That would be ridiculous. Charles Osgood on his radio program the "Osgood File" said that it confused him how bad news took precedence over the good news. I heartily agree. He understood that a person can't ignore the bad news in the world and be taken seriously; but he wondered that bad news was treated as if it were more *real* than good news—as if it were more important and not just more *interesting*. I personally feel that the good news of Christ's life and atonement is just as important, even more important and perhaps more real than the stories of suicide attempts, divorce, and nervous breakdowns. However, to ignore the negative events in our lives is, in a way, to ignore the healing that Christ's life, death, and resurrection brings. It is to ignore the free agency that God gave us and that we fought for. It is to ignore that Christ and Satan came from the same parents and that the only difference between them is the choices they made. God didn't become God by ignoring what was evil in his nature, but by facing the evil and conquering it. According to our popular doctrine, we are now in the same position he once was in. We need to do what he did.

So what does all this have to do with the *Wasatch Review International*? The *Wasatch Review* is interested in great literature. Great literature

has always explored the wholeness of life: the good side, the bad side, and everything in between. And it has done it honestly. Great literature gives both the good side and the bad side the chance to take precedence. The better the author, the broader his perception of life and the more accurate the writing as it relates to life. (I would like to read, if he hadn't have had more important things to do, the novel Christ would have written.)

We are looking for authors who are interested in the Mormon culture but who have nothing to prove. We seek literature that does not purposefully attempt to prove the Church is true or prove that it is false; literature that does not attempt to prove Mormons are the happiest people in the world or the biggest hypocrites. We are looking for literature that as honestly as the author can articulates our triumphs and tragedies, our righteousness and sinfulness, our joys and despairs, for the cause of knowing ourselves better as a people, as a culture, and as individual human beings so that we can, if we choose, live more fully—more wholly.

In this, the charter issue of the *Wasatch Review*, we have some very fine writing. But as good as this issue is I am expecting our following issues to be even better as more writers hear of us and as the writers who now have a place to publish improve their skills. I hope that both writers and readers will respond to this issue with letters to let us know what they like and don't like, what they hope for in future editions. If room permits, we will print these letters.

The "International" portion of our title is there for a purpose. We did not receive any foreign submissions for this issue, but we hope to for the next issue. I think it would be remiss to say that God is an American and that ours is an American church. Some situations are unique to the American Mormon culture, but I for one am also interested in the situations unique (or maybe not so unique) to the Japanese Mormon culture, the South African Mormon culture, the Australian Mormon culture, the Russian Mormon culture, and all the rest. We want to be a platform for their creative work too.

I believe, as Eugene England said, that this is the dawning of a brighter day in Mormon literature. Let us be true to our belief in God and Christ, but let us not be afraid to look at ourselves—all of ourselves. There is no faith in ignorance. Our literature is a reflection of our soul. I hope that by writing for, and reading, the *Wasatch Review International* we can see more clearly who we are, and then become better—become whole, as God is whole.



The Dawning of a Brighter Day:

Mormon Literature after 150 Years

by

Eugene England

I ask you to consider the following: Mormonism is a genuine religious movement, with persistent and characteristic religious and cultural experiences growing out of a unique and coherent theology and a true and thus powerful mythic vision, and it has already produced and is producing the kinds and quality of literature that such experiences and vision might be expected to produce; it is, in fact, right now enjoying a kind of bright dawning, if not a flowering then certainly a profuse and lovely budding, in its literary history.

Many of us, at least until recently, could be excused for not knowing there is a Mormon literature. A serious anthology of Mormon literature, providing a full view of the quality and variety over our nearly 150-year history, was first published only a few years ago. That was Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert's *A Believing People* (1974). At about the same time, these two scholars inaugurated, at Brigham Young University, the first course in Mormon literature. The Association for Mormon Letters, the first professional organization intended to study and encourage Mormon literature, is only a few years old. We have as yet no scholarly bibliography of Mormon literature, no full-scale literary history or developed esthetic principles, little practical and less theoretical literary criticism. The most basic scholarly work—the unearthing and editing of texts, development of biographical materials, and serious literary analysis of our acknowledged classics—is still largely undone.

Note: This excerpt is taken from England, Eugene, "Dawning of a Brighter Day: Mormon Literature after 150 Years," *BYU Studies* 22 no. 2 (Spring 1982): 131-60. Reprinted by permission of the author.

But then again, many things *are* happening, and perhaps there is now less excuse for any continued ignorance or inaction. The anthology has had a second printing, the Mormon literature class continues to prosper, and Mormon classics are being used in other literature and humanities courses. New journals like *Exponent II*, *Sunstone*, and *Sunstone Review* are succeeding and are following the older *Dialogue* and *BYU Studies* in publishing good Mormon literature and criticism. Official Church magazines like the *Ensign* publish serious Mormon stories and poetry more often than previously. We have seen the publication and widespread approval of the biography of Spencer W. Kimball, the first Mormon study of a general Church leader that meets the essential criterion for genuine literary biography phrased by Virginia Woolf, "those truths which transmit personality" (149-50). And now others are being published that do the same for past Church leaders.¹

But, you may rightly be saying, one, or even three, bursting forsythia do not make a spring—nor a Larson and a Thayer and a Geary a flowering of literature, Mormon or not. And others of you might ask, "What is this 'Mormon' literature anyway—something like 'Lutheran' literature or 'Christian Science' literature?" If you have been exposed to some of the agonizing that has been going on for some twenty years about our not having an obviously impressive literature, you might ask, "Aren't we too young a culture or too small a community to expect to have a literature—or aren't Mormons too superficially happy, too anxiety- and conflict-free, to produce a literature, or too busy, or too smug, or too anti-intellectual, or too materialistic, or too censored?" The answer to all these questions is "No." We do in fact have a literature—one whose shape, dimensions, and quality are becoming more and more apparent and impressive. These questions and anxieties are now simply outdated; reality has long passed them by, and good theoretical thinking has caught up with them. The real question now is not how good *is* what we have, but *how* is it good, how, in fact, do we *judge* how it is good? And how do we prepare better to respond to it and to encourage more of the good?

But some might still be saying, "Suppose we do have some good writers. Why talk about *Mormon* literature rather than American literature or, better yet, just literature? Shouldn't our writers just do their best, write honestly and well about the universal human concerns, and address themselves to mankind in general?" Perhaps, but let me suggest another case: Shakespeare and Milton had access to audiences, a *literate* community, smaller than that which is now made up of well-educated English-speaking Mormons (which is probably approaching

three million); does it in any way count against those great poets that they spoke directly and consciously to that limited audience from a base in particular problems, perspectives, and convictions that were essentially English? Or does it count against Dostoevsky that he was consciously, even self-consciously, Russian, or Faulkner that he was consciously Southern?

The only way to the universal is through the particular. The only honesty, ultimately, is honesty to that which we know in our own bones and blood and spirit, our own land and faith, our own doubts and battles and victories and defeats. Mormonism cannot be separated from these things because, unlike religions such as Lutheranism or Christian Science, it makes a large number of rather absolute claims about the nature of the universe and God and human beings, about specific historical events, past and future, about language and form and content—and because it is grounded in a sufficiently unusual and cohesive and extended historical and cultural experience growing directly from those claims that it has become like a nation, an ethnic culture as well as a religion. We can speak of a Mormon literature at least as surely as we can of a Jewish or Southern literature. And it is as legitimate, as promising, for a writer to be consciously Mormon as it has been for Flannery O'Connor to be Southern Catholic or for Isaac Bashevis Singer to be emigré Polish and Jewish.

Mormon writers have much to learn from both of these writers: skills and vision, of course, but also how not to be so universal they lose contact with their roots, so antiparochial they adopt the worst kind of parochialism—that of not knowing oneself and one's own generic community. They can learn from them how to translate religious commitment and the tragedy of religious struggle and paradox into honesty and craft, into fictive creations rather than packaged preachments. As O'Connor has said: "I see from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and what I see in the world I see in its relation to that. I don't think that this is a position that can be taken halfway or one that is particularly easy in these times to make transparent in fiction" (418). But of course her special Catholic vision, however effectively pointing beyond itself to the universal, cannot be adopted by the Mormon writer. The Mormon vision has unique and equally powerful implications for both form and content. What are they? Just what is *Mormon* literature?

I think Karl Keller is right in suggesting that Mormon writers—possibly due to that parochial antiparochialism I mentioned and an understandable

aversion to didactic, simplistically preachy Mormon writing—have produced fiction that is by and large irrelevant to the doctrinal interests of Mormonism. He calls most of what we've written "jack-fiction" (62). In contrast to Flannery O'Connor, many Mormon writers seem to have strained, in the fashion of various schools of emancipated realism, to be far from orthodoxy. Even the "orthodox" have not written imaginative visions of the possibilities of our theology; it is not really *Mormon* fiction. By way of contrast, this is O'Connor describing what she feels she must work out imaginatively in *her* fiction:

It makes a great difference to the look of a novel whether its author believes that the world came late into being and continues to come by a creative act of God, or whether he believes that the world and ourselves are the product of a cosmic accident. It makes a great difference to his novel whether he believes that we are created in God's image, or whether he believes we create God in our own. It makes a great difference whether he believes that our wills are free, or bound like those of the other animals.²

Surely we could make an equally specific list for a Mormon writer. But notice that neither O'Connor nor Keller are suggesting some sophisticated form of packaged message. Any artist's first responsibility is to the form, the embodiment, the word made flesh. If he or she cannot do justice to the visible world and make of it fictions that are believable, he or she cannot be trusted to bear witness to the invisible world; like Flannery O'Connor, Mormon writers must see and imagine steadily and whole—and in convincing formal structures—the surface, including oppositions and evil, the terror in natural human experience, before they can see and imagine how the supernatural supports or intrudes upon that surface.

But if Keller is right, we may have a major explanation for the unfulfilled promise of Mormon fiction. It has effectively imagined the Mormon past and some of the conflicts inherent in contemporary Mormon public and private life but has left Mormonism's unique God and the dramatic and unusual Mormon view of man's cosmic dilemma and destiny out of the picture. The fact that some are making a beginning in those new directions is a major reason I expect the dawning of a brighter day.

Let me try here to expand our awareness of fruitful possibilities in these new directions. And though it is ultimately impossible to separate form and content, and dangerous to try, let me begin with a few comments on form. In the "King Follett Discourse," itself a classic piece of

Mormon literature, Joseph Smith refers to "chaotic matter—which is element and in which dwells all the glory" (see Larson 203). That helps bring into imaginative focus the hints throughout scripture and the writings of Mormon thinkers that suggest a certain metaphysics of form; order is wrought from a pluralistic chaos but a chaos that is *potent*, genuinely responsive to the creative powers of God and man embodied in mind and language, characteristics God and his children share as literally related beings. The Doctrine and Covenants, section 88:6-11, ties together the divine mind and cosmic creative power of Christ with man's perception through the media of physical and spiritual light, which are pronounced to be fundamentally the same. All this suggests the seeds of a philosophy of form at least as interesting and defensible as the epistemological skepticism that has contributed to the breakdown in structure characteristic of modern literature. A truly Mormon literature would stand firm against secular man's increasing anxiety about the ability of language to get at the irreducible otherness of things outside the mind—to make sense, and beauty, of that "chaotic matter—which is element."

If Mormon writers take seriously their faith that language is a gift from God the creator, a gift that gives them access to the "glory" that dwells in matter and in other intelligences, including God's, they can confidently use language, not like others merely to imitate (albeit with compassionate despair) the separated, meaningless, raw elements and experiences of a doomed universe but to create genuinely new things, verbal structures of element and intelligence and experience that include understanding and judgment as well as imitation and empathy. We can, like our contemporaries, create of words what Wallace Stevens called "things that do not exist without the words" (122), but we can do so without his undermining fear that what he was doing was merely an ephemeral human activity, a game to occupy until final doom; we can be sustained by the faith that what we are doing is rooted in the nature of the cosmos and shared by God.

In other words there should be in Mormon writers a special respect for language and form, attention to their tragic limitations but also to their real possibilities. This would mean, I would think, a rather conservative respect for proven traditional forms until they are genuinely understood and surpassed. At least it would mean unusual resistance to the flight from form, from faith in language, toward obscurity and proud assertion of the purely personal vision that afflicts much writing in our time and energizes the popular form of criticism called "deconstruction."

Now what about content? Obviously, Mormon literature will draw, as much of it already has, on certain specially evocative characteristics of Mormon history and scriptural narrative. I don't mean irrigation and polygamy and Lamanite warriors but rather a certain epic consciousness and mythic identification with ancient peoples and processes: the theme of exile and return, of the fruitful journey into the wilderness; the pilgrim traveling the dark and misty way to the tree of salvation; the lonely quest for selfhood that leads to conversion and then to the paradox of community; the desert as crucible in which to make saints, not gold; the sacramental life that persists in spiritual experience and guileless charity despite physical and cultural deprivation; the fortunate fall from innocence and comfort into a lone and dreary world where opposition and tragic struggle can produce virtue and salvation. Much remains to be done with these. And it would be *Mormon* literature—though, of course, not exclusively so, since we share forms of these mythic truths with various others.

Then there are certain contemporary implications of our underlying cultural heritage and beliefs that provide unusually rich, though again not unique, dramatic possibilities: for instance, both the unusual sense of order and also the openings to tragic failure provided a life by the making of covenants, of promises to self and God in baptism and weekly communion through bread and water; or the fearful, solemn, and nobly exciting dimension given marriage by promises of obedience and fidelity and consecration made before God and angels on holy ground. What can be done with a physical and mental landscape peopled perhaps even more literally than Isaac Bashevis Singer's with devils, with embodiments of ultimate, intransigent evil who mock and betray, and also peopled with translated beings from ancient America who bemuse folklorists and bless simple folk from Panguitch and Downey, and also with angels who bring glad tidings to wise and holy men and women and children, who are thus inspired to speak great and marvelous, unspeakable things? And what can be done with the Mormon animism that hears the earth groan with its wickedness or the mountains shout for joy, that moves people to bless oxen and crops, even automobiles and trees? What can be made of the spiritual literalness that hears a daughter calling for help on the other side of the world or takes in stride faithfulness that is stronger than the cords of death and brings dead friends and family on privileged visits back to comfort and instruct?

Fine non-Mormon poets, W. S. Merwin for one, have written beautifully of the deep yearning we have for the miracle of a loved one's

return to us—and of the strange possibility.³ Mormons with a more literal belief have the resources to do as well and better, if they have the courage of their convictions and the discipline to work as hard to create an honest visible world that the invisible world can break through; it is because for Mormons, as for Gerard Manley Hopkins, "the Holy Ghost over the bent / World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings" (70).

But there is even a deeper layer, as yet hardly touched in Mormon literature, but with, I believe, the greatest potential for uniqueness and power, the one suggested directly by Flannery O'Connor's list. It would require more theological literacy and more imaginative response to our theology. Karl Keller, in the essay mentioned earlier, suggests that Mormon writers should begin with careful reading of Sterling McMurrin's *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion*, which he calls "essentially an outline of esthetic possibilities of Mormon articles of belief" (Keller 70). I would recommend Joseph Smith and B. H. Roberts, and John Widstoe and Hugh B. Brown and Truman Madsen and, yes, Brigham Young and Joseph Fielding Smith and Spencer W. Kimball and the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price and, from the Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 2 and Alma 42, and so forth. And what would that do for a Mormon writer, other than tempt him toward a suicidal didacticism? It could nurture his imagination with the most challenging and liberating set of metaphysical possibilities and paradoxes I have been able to discover in all human thought. Consider only a few, beginning with the keystone: that human beings, like the gods, are at core uncreated and underived, individual intelligences, without beginning or end; they are possessed of truly infinite potential, literal gods in embryo, but are bound inescapably in a real environment of spirit and element and other beings that impinge upon them and that, as they learn successfully to relate to the environment, exact real costs in suffering and loss and bring real joy in relationship and growth. Freedom, for a Mormon writer—or fictional character—is not a mysterious illusion, as it must be for traditional Christians with their absolute, omnipotent God, nor is it a pragmatic tautology, as it must be for existentialists who define existence, however temporary, as freedom. Freedom is ultimate and inescapable responsibility in a real world that is neither a shadow of something more real lying beyond it that God determines at will nor a doomed accident.

The consequences for dramatic action and lyric reflection seem to be considerable: for one thing, as I think Truman Madsen has said, "Suicide

is just a change of scenery." For another, as the Mormon theologian B. F. Cummings put it, "The Self is insubordinate, wandering, imperially aloof, solitary, lonely, withdrawn, unvisited, impenetrable"; it "cannot escape from existence nor can it escape from the awareness of its existence" nor from the "inevitable sense of solitude" that is "born of the very fact of individuality," of "being an eternally identical one."⁴ Put that together with the equally firm teaching that man without God is nothing, less than the dust of the earth (for the elements are at least obedient to God's creative will), that mortals are utterly dependent on God, who sustains, moment by moment, their existence in mortality though not their eternal essence and who provides the only way of salvation through relation to his Son. And put it together with that strange paradox of Atonement, the fortunate fall: each individual *must* lose innocence, experience opposition and sin, know failure, struggle with justice and guilt, before he or she will let Christ break the bonds of justice, tear down barriers within to bring the bowels of mercy—and so accept himself in love and thus have strength to develop the conscious intelligent virtues of Christ. And put all this together with the idea that, imperially alone and impenetrable as the individual is, he and she cannot fully and ultimately realize their own true nature and achieve their fullest potential and joy except in the ongoing achievement of an eternal, fully sexual, companionship—an idea authenticated by the Mormon image of God as being God precisely and only in such a female and male oneness.

I am *not* proposing formal creed for Mormon writers. I am merely suggesting that there is available to Mormon writers, part of what they in fact already are, a rich loam—a topsoil of historical experience, mythic consciousness, and unique theology—as rich as that available to any other writers, more rich than that of most of their gentile contemporaries. To change the image to one that has characteristically been made into a Mormon cliché, I suggest we put down our buckets where we are rather than complaining of thirst while rowing so madly for foreign shores. Even if rooting ourselves in that rich topsoil would tend to limit us to a Mormon or traditional Christian audience—and I am not, on the example of O'Connor and Singer, ready to grant that—even so, that is a large enough and worthy enough audience, and one that needs as much as any to be served by the values that literature can provide. We in the Mormon community need to be brought out of our existential loneliness, to experience what other Mormons feel, to understand imaginatively and share with each other our fears and doubts and joys and visions and small victories in the communal and

individual working out of our salvation. For those who believe the gospel is true in any essential sense, there need be no greater ambition for Mormon literature—at least to begin with—than to speak truly and well, about what is essential, to Mormons.

These suggestions I have made about a definition of Mormon literature and about a Mormon esthetic are, again, only preliminary, but even with this small beginning we have, I think, enough on which to base some useful outlines for a literary history. Let me suggest, based on this definition, one scheme that may be helpful conceptually and may evoke further study. One way of seeing our literary history is in terms of three fifty-year periods and three kinds of rebels. During the first fifty years or so—into the 1880s—a uniquely Mormon, nontraditional literature was produced by men and women caught up in the restored gospel's rebellion against the world, against Babylon. For them it was literally and ecstatically true, as one of their fine hymns expressed it, that "the morning breaks, the shadows flee" and that "the glory bursting from afar, wide o'er the nations soon will shine" (Parley P. Pratt, "The Morning Breaks," *Hymns*, no. 269). They rejected, with powerful arguments, the economic, political, and moral conditions of England, Europe, and America; and with incredible courage and self-sacrifice they built genuine alternatives that continue to thrill us. And, I submit, they produced an extraordinary and valuable literature about their feelings, thoughts, and experiences, literature we have too long neglected but are beginning to recover and appreciate—to learn *how* to appreciate—as we should.

The second fifty years, from about 1880 to 1930, is a barren period in Mormon literature with, I believe, hardly anything of lasting value published or written (at least in the usual literary genres). But there are important literary as well as historical questions to be answered by a study of that period, questions about the nature of the Church after the disappointment of the popular expectation of Christ's coming in 1890, the Manifesto of that year (in the view of many a capitulation to the government and secular American society), and the period of accommodation to American styles and values that followed statehood in 1896. Historians and literary critics need to work together to understand the relations between Church and culture in this difficult period. And one phenomenon they will need to look at carefully is that during this time there was an outpouring of poems, stories, and novels, mainly in the Church magazines and press, that were known as "home

literature" and were designed for the edification of the Saints. At first look, many have assumed that such literature was so bad and so deadening an influence on Mormon literary culture in general because it was too Mormon; I believe it was not Mormon enough. Edward Geary is right in making a distinction that applies to that literature and from which we can learn some lessons that apply directly today, when we face the same dangers as well as the equally great danger of overreaction to those dangers. In his landmark essay on Mormon regional fiction, Geary notes that the home literature movement, which began in the 1880s, was an explicit instrument for spreading the gospel, one which, in Apostle and poet Orson Whitney's words, "like all else with which we have to do, must be made subservient to the building up of Zion" ("Home Literature"; repeated in Cracroft and Lambert 205). In explaining why that movement has not met Elder Whitney's hope that Mormonism would produce "Miltons and Shakespeares of our own" Geary writes:

It is one thing to ask the artist to put his religious duties before his literary vocation or to write from his deepest convictions. It is quite another to insist that he create from a base in dogma rather than a base in experience. . . . [Home literature] is not a powerful literature artistically, it is not pure. In most cases its distinctive Mormon characteristics are only skin deep, masking an underlying vision which is as foreign to the gospel as it is to real life. (Geary, "The Poetics of Provincialism" 15)

For example, think of the popular, entertaining, and "edifying" *Saturday's Warrior*, with its slick sophistication, its misleading if not heretical theology, and its stereotyping toward bigotry in the social references—under the skin as foreign to the gospel as to real life. Geary continues, "The early home literature borrowed the techniques of popular sentimental fiction and the values of the genteel tradition with a superficial adaptation to Mormon themes, and this practice continues only slightly modified."

You can easily see the continuing influence of that movement in the official magazines and in Church press novels of today; but it is perhaps at least as unfortunate that the reaction against that movement, however well intentioned, also too often fails to see the superior Mormon literature available or the importance and possibility of trying to produce it. We forget Geary's distinction—that though it is illegitimate and destructive to insist that a writer create from dogma rather than experience it might well be legitimate and valuable to ask him, as I

think the Church properly does, to put his religious duties before his literary vocation and to write from his deepest convictions.

After that long hiatus in the middle of Mormon literature, we have had a period of about fifty years of considerable output and much quality, but by two quite different kinds of rebels from two *literary* generations that overlap. The first of these began most prominently with Vardis Fisher in the 1930s and has lingered, in Samuel Taylor, up into the early 1970s; it has been aptly characterized by Ed Geary as Mormondom's "lost generation" ("Mormondom's Lost Generation" 89-98). And Geary has shown that the writers were, like American literature's "lost generation" of twenty years before, defined by various degrees of rebellion against their "provincial" culture, by a patronizing alienation infused with nostalgia for a vanishing way of life that would not let them turn completely away to other loyalties and subject matter, even when they became in one way or another expatriated. They were the first generation of the twentieth century, growing up when Mormon isolation was breaking down, rural Mormondom was depopulating, and urban Mormonism was apparently becoming crassly materialistic. It was easy for them to see the Church, however heroic in the nineteenth century, as failing, the Mormon experiment as rapidly ending. And they saw themselves as the first well-educated generation of Mormonism, able to look with some amusement upon the naiveté of Mormon thought.

Such rather adolescent alienation has persisted in many intellectuals of that generation. It has persisted despite the refutations provided by historical analysis that recently has been done—and despite the achievements that were being made even *during* that period in such areas as well-written theology and history, by B. H. Roberts, John A. Widtsoe, and others.

The "lost generation" of writers, and those who shared their sense of Mormonism's decline, actually thought there would not be another generation after them. And as late as 1969 Dale Morgan, writing on Mormon literature, could say, "A lot of the urgency has gone out of [the Mormon] sense of mission as the millennial expectation has subsided and the powerful 'gathering' phase of Mormon history has run its course" (32). That was written just before the remarkable new missionary energies, the growth to genuine world status and millennial vision, that have come in the 1970s. As Geary writes, "From the viewpoint of the present, expansionist period in Mormon history, the dead-end vision [of the lost generation] seems rather quaint" ("Poetics of Provincialism" 24).

But he adds a warning—that each generation has its own provinciality, that just as the views of those writers of the 1940s now seem as naive to us as their parents' views seemed to them, so our own views may appear naive to our children. It is certain that despite my criticism of various kinds of provincialism I have my own kind. My best hope is to help us all guard against provinciality by suggesting additional possibilities, more and better perceived options, for our thinking about Mormonism and its literary tradition.

One other option, less provincial, I believe, because more inclusive than that of the Mormon novelists of the 1940s, is the direction taken by the third literary generation of rebels in my historical scheme. It is the second one within the past fifty years of renewed life in Mormon literature after the empty—or perhaps, given the harvest that followed, what could be called the “fallow”—middle fifty-year period. This generation overlaps with the “lost generation” somewhat and is, I believe, the one coming into flower right now, carrying my hope for the “dawning of a brighter day.” These writers are characterized by various kinds of degrees of sincere commitment to the unique and demanding religious claims of Mormonism as well as to its people, history, and culture. Yet they are as clear-sighted and devastating in their analysis and criticism of Mormon mistakes and tragedies both historical and present, as were the “lost generation”—in some cases *more* incisive because less naive and more emphatically involved themselves in Mormon conflicts and mistakes.

For instance, Richard Bushman, in his important essay ten years ago called “Faithful History,” suggested some innovative, characteristically Mormon, approaches to writing history; one of those sees the fundamental dramatic tension in religious history not (in the way most Mormon history has been written) as that between an all-righteous Church and an evil world but (as in fact most scriptural history is written) as that between God and his church: “In the second, the Lord tries to establish his kingdom, but the stubborn people whom He favors with revelation ignore him much of the time and must be brought up short” (18). Here is one area where Mormon literature is perhaps ahead of Mormon historiography, because many of this latest generation of what I have called “rebels” are writing with just that perspective, focusing, like the prophets, on the struggles with faith and righteousness among the so-called chosen people as well as in the world. But, with these (unlike the “lost generation”), there is no patronization, no superior pointing of fingers, but rather full identification; they draw much their

power of specification from their own experience, their own conflicts and failures—and also the redemptive charity that comes from their own genuine attempts in their own lives to repent, to live out the conflicts and sacrificial duties faith demands. Bushman concludes his essay with a suggestion that the finest Mormon history would be written not by writers who simply transfer various Mormon ideas or perspectives into their work or merely use certain techniques they think are Mormon, but by real changes in *all* things that shape their vision of the world in response to the self within, which they encounter in moments of genuine faith. In a challenging inversion of the traditional Mormon axiom about being saved no faster than we gain knowledge, Bushman suggests that a Mormon cannot improve as a historian (I would add writer) without improving as a human being—in moral insights, spiritual commitment, and critical intelligence: As writers, “we gain knowledge no faster than we are saved.” I believe this latest generation’s growing quality is related to that kind of wholeness; they are finding out, tentatively and awkwardly, but surely, what it can mean for an artist to be a Latter-day Saint—a genuine follower of Christ.

* * *

Now let me conclude with some problems and possibilities. I realize that the challenge of properly relating scholarship and artistic achievement to moral character or religious faith—of connecting truth and goodness to beauty—is a huge and treacherous one, one that has not been met with very great success by many, past or present. But I find, even at Brigham Young University, a surprising lack of interest in trying to meet the challenge, an almost secularist distrust, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, of any attempt to directly apply gospel perspectives and standards to scholarship or artistry. Part of that distrust stems from a very proper revulsion (which I share fully) at seeing such combinations made naively or superficially or self-righteously, but we are untrue to our professional responsibilities as well as our faith if we do not somehow come to terms with the charge given us by the chairman of the BYU Board of Trustees, President Spencer W. Kimball, in his “Second Century Address”:

We surely cannot give up our concerns with character and conduct without also giving up on mankind. Much misery results from flaws in character, not from failures in technology. We cannot give in to the ways of the world with regard to the

realm of art. . . . Our art must be the kind which edifies man, which takes into account his immortal nature, and which prepares us for heaven. (454)

I feel certain President Kimball was not talking about simple piety, superficial Mormonism of the kind our home literature has fostered. Later that day when he asked the Lord to "let the morality of the graduates of this University provide the music of hope for the inhabitants of this planet" (457), it was a beautiful and lucid but also very challenging moment that we have not yet come to terms with. And we *will* not if we on the one hand resist that charge as too pious and unacademic for serious scholars or on the other hand think it only has to do with the Word of Wisdom and dress standards, rather than the serious and extremely difficult moral issues our graduates will face in the world—such as the increasingly shrill and violent struggles of various groups for and against certain "rights," the overwhelming hopelessness of the poor and ignorant and suppressed, and "the wars and the perplexities of the nations" (Doctrine and Covenants 88:79).

President Kimball was speaking in a great tradition of the latter-day prophets, a tradition we sometimes forget. Listen to Brigham Young:

There is not, has not been, and never can be any method, scheme, or plan devised by any being in this world for intelligence to eternally exist and obtain an exaltation, without knowing the good and the evil—without tasting the bitter and the sweet. Can the people understand that it is actually necessary for opposite principles to be placed before them, or this state of being would be no probation, and we should have no opportunity for exercising the agency given us? Can they understand that we cannot obtain eternal life unless we actually know and comprehend by our experience the principle of good and the principle of evil, the light and the darkness, truth, virtue, and holiness—also vice, wickedness and corruption? (JD 7:237)

Or listen to Joseph Smith:

The things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O Man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss and the broad expanse of eternity. (HC 3:295)

Nothing superficial or pious or sentimental there; it would be hard to find better statements of what the greatest, the most *challenging*,

literature and other works of art succeed in doing. And for these purposes the kind of art I have been describing and proposing to you—that is, genuine Mormon literature—is, I believe, one of our richest and most direct resources. Such literature has unique and long-proven ability to teach not only moral rigor and sensitivity but to teach specific moral intelligence. But we who are the teachers, the critics, the literate audience must not be overly optimistic, too easy in our criticism, slothful in our expectations of what a truly Mormon literature will be and will cost. I trust I am not guilty of those faults here: I have really been trying to show that it is *not easier* to be a good Christian or Mormon writer, but more difficult; piety will not take the place of inner gifts or tough thinking or hard training and work.

The dangers of mixing religion and art are clear and present—from both sides. Literature is not a substitute for religion and making it such is a sure road to hell; and just as surely religious authority is no substitute for honest literary perception and judgment—and didactic, apologetic, or sentimental writing, however "true" in some literal sense, is no substitute for real literature in its power to grasp and change. In the direction of such sentimentalism lies spiritual suicide. We must stop rewarding the "pious trash," as Flannery O'Connor called much Catholic literature—a phrase that well describes much of our own—and we must, on the other hand, also stop awarding prizes to those stories which, for instance, in reaching for unearned maturity, use sexual explicitness or sophomoric skepticism as faddish, but phony, symbols of intellectual and moral sophistication and freedom—or merely to titillate their Mormon audience. Various forms of Scylla and Charybdis threaten all about, and we must proceed with some caution along straight and narrow courses.

But we should also have the courage of our supposed convictions. People outside the Church are calling Mormonism such things as the only successful American religious movement or recognizing Joseph Smith as the most interesting religious mind in America or Brigham Young as one of the world's most impressive empire builders and practical thinkers. Many of us have even stronger convictions about the inherent greatness and interest of our heritage and its people. We now need to be willing to do the scholarship; to recover and explicate the texts; to write the biographies, the literary criticism, the theory; to teach—even to do the simple reading—that will help bring to full flower a culture commensurate with our great religious and historical roots.

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Notes

1. See Edward L. Kimball and Andrew E. Kimball, Jr. *Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1977); Eugene England, *Brother Brigham* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980); Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Truman G. Madsen, *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980); Frank W. Fox, *J. Reuben Clark: The Public Years* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company and Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1980).
2. Flannery O' Connor, "Novelist and Believer," *Mystery and Manners*, 156-57, in Keller, "Example of Flannery O' Connor," 68.
3. W. S. Merwin, "Come Back," quoted and discussed in Robert Pinsky, *The Situation of Poetry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 95. See also N. Scott Momaday, *The Complete Poems of Frederick Goddard Tuckerman*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 15, 35, 36.
4. B. F. Cummings, *The Eternal Individual Self* (Salt Lake City: Utah Publishing Co., 1968), 7, 6, 9, 70, quoted in Bruce Jorgensen, "'Herself Moving beside Herself, Out There Alone': The Shape of Mormon Belief in Virginia Sorensen's *The Evening and the Morning*," *Dialogue* 13 (Fall 1980): 43-61.

Piling Cords

1

At noon I sat under oak trees
listening for wind
to stop. At age six
I scratched my name
under Father's on the oak,
cracking open acorns,
talking each night, our words
joined by voices in leaves.

2

Into my fourth grade tree fort
I took neighbor boys and girls
to cook them scrambled eggs,
striking a match to yellow leaves.
We cracked eggs on a skillet
from Mother's cupboard.
Flames reached
into unfallen acorns.
We ran for pails of water.

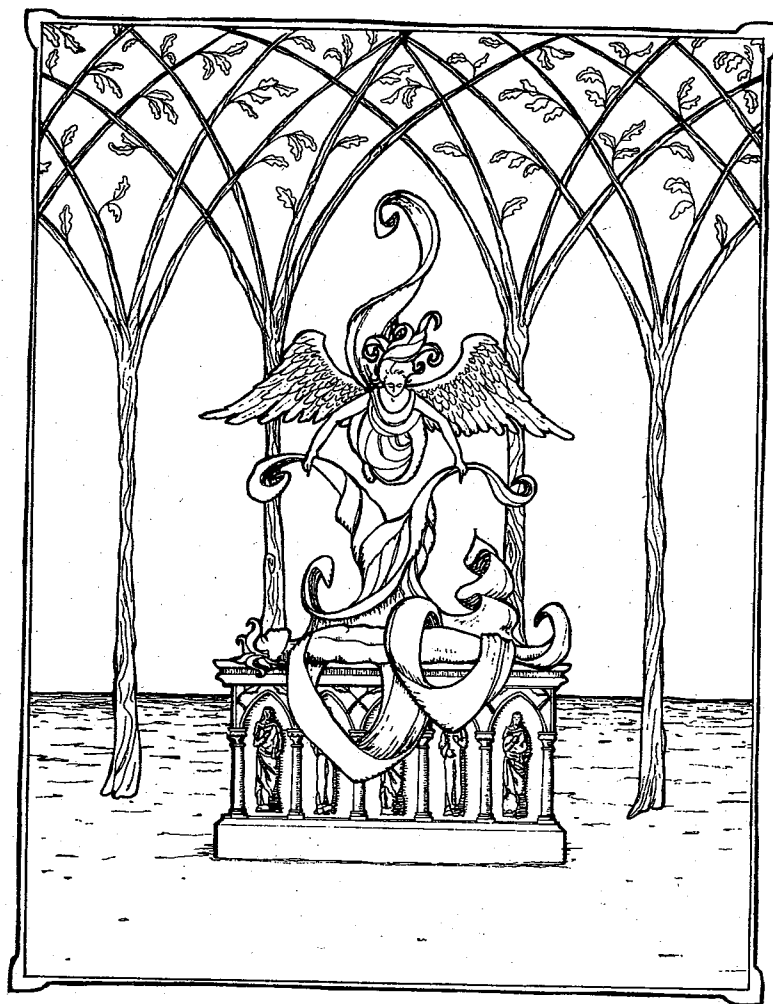
3

In seventh grade Greg and I
built a fort in a plum tree.
I took Cally there
to have our first kiss.
Hiding from Father,
electric as deer,
we leaned close,
putting plums to our faces,
our noses in a scent of plums,
not yet ripe.

4

I split wood each year,
listening to grain rip,
piling cords,
rubbing my fingers
over rough bark
on our fallen oak tree.
I run my fingertips
into the grooves in my initials,
wanting to pull them back
into my knife.

—William H. Powley



Two Years Sunday

by

Wayne Jorgensen

I've been going on my bike out to my husband's grave about every Sunday when the weather is good and no one is down to visit. The stone has his name and birth and death dates carved on one side and my name and birth date on the other; below them is "Married" and the date of his twenty-first birthday in 1932. We waited till he was of age so he wouldn't need to ask his parents. He didn't last to sixty-four, and I've passed him now. Like I said to our boy Carl, "It's not like we say. He's stopped and I'm the one who passed on." I didn't tell Carl this, but some days I don't much care how long I keep on.

He was down Friday night with his family and left today. They come when they can, I guess, which isn't often. It's a regular expedition, with all the little suitcases and diapers and pillows and bears. Carl was Gray's proxy when we did his temple work. They're after me to sell this house and move to Provo. Where they can take better care of me, they say. Where I can baby-sit, I expect. But that wouldn't be bad, and I could live in a nice condo and go to plays and lectures at the university and get to the temple easy when I wanted to. But the thought of going through all the things in this house.

They left early to get back to Provo before bedtime. All those kids and their noise and the food they don't like. Forget your fish sticks and turkey roll, just get in plenty of hotdogs and cookies and potato chips and mix Tang with Sprite in it, and a big pot of sloppy joe. And then the old toys they leave scattered around the basement bedrooms. But I don't mind that much—it's something to do after they've gone: pick

Note: Bruce W. Jorgensen thinks his middle name ought to be good for something besides cute allusions to Batman and has decided to use it as a cover for dubious endeavors like fiction and poetry.

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up Lincoln logs and Robin Hood suits and plastic cavalry and Indians and spacemen, the toys my boys left behind. I don't know which is worse, people not coming to see you, or them coming and how you feel after they leave. It's the same if you go see them.

* * *

I told Carl and Lea some things, maybe some I've told them before, while we sat in the living room with the TV on Saturday night. They weren't very connected maybe. I know I'm getting old faster.

"Your dad always said, 'When I die I'm going back to the dirt,'" I said to Carl.

"I know, Mama," he said. "That was what he thought. We did what we could."

"I know," I said to him. "I'll probably just have to wait and die to know if he accepts. But not being sure makes being alone hard."

"We know, Mother," Lea said. "It's one reason why we want you to come live near us. But everything will be all right."

"I thought maybe I would get some assurance," I said. "In the temple, something might come to me." I started working at the Manti Temple after we did the work for Gray.

"It could, it could," Carl said. "You never know. Though it might not."

"People in our family have had visits at home," I reminded him. "Lida's boy Ray got killed carrying wounded on Iwo Jima and walked into Edna's house one afternoon plain as her hand, in dirty army clothes and smelling like a month without a bath, and asked for a glass of water."

"Well, I don't know if Dad—" Carl starts up.

But I'm going on. "Me too," I said. "Once while Mama was staying with us before she died—you remember that. But maybe I didn't tell you I saw Papa in the hall by her door, tucking in his shirttail and straightening his suspenders; his mouth showed his dentures were out. The dead don't just disappear."

"You never know," Carl said. "You could still have something. Then maybe not." Repeating himself. We'd about wore that topic out.

I said, "After that last operation he came home and wouldn't stay in our room anymore. I asked him why."

"He was just feeling really awful then, Mama. He lost something that time, really lost something."

I said to Carl, "I asked him what had I done or how had I hurt him? But he wouldn't say; just 'I'm all right, it's nothing.' Nothing, I ask you."

"You shouldn't dwell on that, Mama; he was a sick man. Dying."

"And after, Mother," Lea says, "he must have known better; he must have understood. I'm sure he does."

"It was congestive heart failure that killed him," I said, "not the cancer."

"We know," they said. I knew they knew. I know how I'm getting and my mind goes over and over things.

"Congestive makes you think of clogged," I said, "a stuffed heart. But with too much of what?" I looked hard at them both. We're all stumped.

I told them about the morning we left for the county hospital three weeks before Gray died to see if they could help the joint pains. "Did I tell you," I said, "how he said 'Wait a minute' and went in the shop and came out with his bait box? He dumped the worms and wet dirt out at the head of a radish row and said, 'I guess I've seen the last of my fishing.'"

"That must have been hard for him," Lea said.

"There were a lot of hard things for him," Carl said.

"I don't know who it was harder for," I said. "Sometimes that colostomy thing of his? It'd make a noise—you know—and he'd say, 'Quiet, rosebud.' He could joke about a thing like that."

"Oh, Mother," says Lea, "didn't you tell us you laughed too?"

About then the news came on so we watched what had been happening. When they drove off after church and sloppy joes today, there was still plenty of daylight left. I stood there at the end of the drive watching their station wagon blur down the street, and figured I might as well take my ride.

* * *

This is summer, blue and dry, the first Sunday in August two years after. But that polished granite is like looking into freezing canal water. It's an anniversary in a way. But riding the bike I couldn't carry flowers, and there was nothing to say and less to hear.

Like I said to Carl, I know the dead don't just disappear forever. They're there all right. But going away was Graham's habit, whatever made him come back, right to the end.

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Part of it was he wasn't a member of the Church. When we got married that wasn't a big thing. I thought I would convert him; Mama and Papa did too. He smoked and sometimes went to the Honky Tonk, but he never brought beer home and didn't usually drink and drive. He was a good hard-working boy, and we were sweethearts all through high school and while he went two winter quarters at the AC. His mother set him against the Church. She was always bitter, and after his dad died the two of them could make me cry and have to leave the room. His dad dying was hard on him. How that man wanted to live—he did everything his doctors told him to keep his heart going, salt-free food, no strenuous work. "I want to see my grandkids grow," he said. He loved going in the mountains, the roads through quaking aspen. He'd been in Salt Lake; his doctor said he was doing fine, and he didn't answer his wake-up call at the hotel that morning. Died in his sleep, alone. And it all fell on Gray—telling his mother, driving up there to bring his dad home, and then running the farms and ranch and stock. His brothers were drunks or too weak, so it all fell on him.

He started drinking more and staying out most of the night. Once a patrolman in the next county put him in jail so he couldn't drive home, and the patrolman woke me up calling to tell me. Mama and Papa thought I should leave him, and I thought about it. That period lasted close to six years, nights when Jared and I had to help him upstairs and into bed, till one New Year's he staggered out barefoot in the snow in the pasture in the dark and fell into a side-delivery rake he'd parked there. I'd followed, and I brought him in and washed his cuts and put Merthiolate on them. Then I sat in the living room by him in the rocker until he passed out. I stayed awake and saw him soak his pants in his sleep. I felt like crying. I shook him and said, "Hadn't you ought to get up and bathe and change clothes?" He woke and looked at himself and said, "By God, I've peed my pants like a baby." That was enough. He never touched it again.

He was strong that way—willpower. It was the same with cigarettes when his doctor said he ought to quit. His last pack lay in the hall cupboard and rotted. But he never got over his habit of going away, driving his truck up in the mountains to see the sheep, or out in the valley to look at the fields, even just fields full of tumbleweeds. Or he'd ride a horse into the hills on a hot day, the trail past one cemetery and around the stone quarry to the salt gap and back past this cemetery where he's buried in the same lot with his dad and mother. They have the same color stones.

He went away but always came back. But then away again so you couldn't tell which was the main thing, going or coming. Maybe that or the mountains and the fields was his religion, though I never would have said that to him. We didn't talk religion much unless he and his mother got going on it. The last time I brought it up and asked him if he couldn't try to believe for the boys' sake, he swore at me and said never mention it again and left the house. I thought maybe finally, but he came back. No making up, but he came back.

* * *

I brushed at the film of dust on his stone with my fingers. Our stone. Then I pushed my whole hand flat against it, not cold, not warm, hard.

Once I thought we'd lost him. He went off just before a Fourth of July to camp by himself, with just a horse and a little tent and bedroll and some food and water. I could see it start to storm up there in the mountains where he'd gone, and when Carl came with his family we spent the whole third of July driving muddy mountain roads looking where he should have been. Some men fishing said they saw him but didn't know which way he went. We gave up and came home, about to call the Sheriff's jeep posse when he turned up. He'd caught cold and gone to stay at the ranch, and we never thought of looking there, he'd planned to be miles away over the mountain. "I know enough to get in out of the rain," he said.

But he didn't believe. He got scared before both his heart operations and was glad to have the Priesthood bless him. The one time he said maybe there was something to it; if God would help him, he'd try going to Church. He did go to meetings there in the LDS Hospital. But when we got home he was the same as before. It was the only thing close to a promise I ever saw him break.

Not believing must have made death harder for him. When his mother was going he went to stay the night in the hospital. I offered to go with, the boys were all gone then, but he said no, he'd do it himself, so he was there alone. When he came home the next morning he didn't say anything except she was gone. He looked caved-in, like part of him had been sucked away. Things like that and his operations wore him down.

* * *

I took my hand off the stone and watched the blood come back into my fingers. I'm old—it takes a long enough time to notice. After the last operation, which I thought would kill him, he had the joint pains the doctor said came from acid crystals growing like splinters of ice because his kidneys couldn't handle what he took to help his heart. He was caught between one thing and the other. When he slept alone then maybe it was the pain and he was going away to be in it. He slept and most days lay on the small bed in the spare room. That last week, last six days, Gray stayed there most of the time, mostly obeying the doctor. He was supposed to not get up at all so his heart could rest. But after midnight on Thursday I heard him get up and put on his boots and go out. I followed and there he was with the shovel fixing a dam so the water turn would flood the back lawn. He was always in charge of that, but I told him he shouldn't do it, he ought to stay in bed. He said, "It's got to be done right." I said, "It doesn't matter, let it go." He turned away and said, "They take everything away."

* * *

Each thing is the worst until the next one. It's true no matter where you start or what order you take them in. With the cancer the first time, he went for weeks not able to keep food down, not able to pass anything solid, vomiting up what he should have passed. Finally, when he was in so much pain, I drove him all the way to Salt Lake. He lay on the back seat and I drove. He always used to drive. They operated barely soon enough to keep his intestine from bursting and poisoning him, working so fast they had to go in again a few days later to finish it right. He always hated to admit he was sick or go to a doctor. That second time he was deathly afraid and Joel cried so hard he could barely bless him. But he came through it and got home with his colostomy. Something more was gone out of him. That much fear broke him. But we learned to irrigate and use the bags. He kept a book of matches in the bathroom to light a candle to burn away the odor, but I never noticed it much.

He started having trouble again the next winter, and the doctor said it might be new adhesions, so we went into the hospital again in March. I remember him hunched over the toilet bowl in the hospital room bathroom. The hollow above his collarbone was so deep and I had to see again how loose the flesh hung from the bones of his arms and legs. Just more of those things you wish you hadn't seen but you

know you have to and you'd feel worse if you didn't. This time when Jared and Carl blessed him he covered his eyes with his hand, and when they were done he turned toward the wall with his face clinched. That was just before the orderly brought the cart. When they wheeled him out he grabbed Carl's hand and I heard him say the worst thing was his nerve was gone.

We waited hours that time, eight or nine, sometimes dozing since we'd slept so little the night before. I dreamed in a chair that he was in Church saying a prayer and got all the way to the end and wouldn't finish, though I kept telling him, "Say it, say *In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.*" I told Carl the dream and said how funny I thought it was. It is awful to dream things that true. When they finally brought him out I almost wished he hadn't survived, he was so flat, sunk so far. But he came up again, with the new incision like a big zipper from his breastbone to his groin. I spent the days sitting with him, helping him eat and irrigate. After three weeks we went home. We stopped in Provo to see Carl's family, and I can still see Gray in the new plaid jacket I bought him, shrunk but standing, grinning at a little grandson dangling from his thumbs, standing there with the light from the window coming around him.

He was quiet when we got home. Something more gone. Still he dug worms in the garden and filled his bait box and put his rod in the truck. He wasn't up to driving in the mountains, but on Decoration Day we all rode up with Carl driving and us telling stories about peeling poles and sliding down them on pieces of slick bark when we were kids. Carl drove up a road Gray thought would take us back over to the main canyon. Up and up like something you dream, and it finally petered out on a high mountain side in a flat turnaround where some oil or gas company had been prospecting for a well. I think we all felt lost.

We got out and walked around looking off down the mountain, across the ridges as far as we could see. Gray stood off by himself, holding himself in tight. When we got back in the cab he put his arm across the seat back, and when Carl leaned to look behind to turn around, the seat pinched his hand against the wall of the cab. I felt him wince from it and stay tight but he didn't make a sound. It was the last time he saw those places and roads.

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Flecks in the stone look like snowflakes melting in the dark. I dumped the withered flowers and stinking water out of the metal vases chained on each side of the stone's base and then set the vases back upside down in their sockets. I took some more dead flowers out of a mason jar tipped on its side on the grave (the grass was fine and it hadn't sunk) and I carried all the old flowers over to the trash barrel by the fence. Then I walked back to the grave. It was quiet there—there was that to like about it. The long, bare stone quarry hill to the east looks like a giant wave of dirt there. People are buried with their feet to the east. On resurrection day they'll see the sun come up.

With the flowers thrown away there wasn't anything left to do—no weeds to pull, grass watered by the sexton who gets paid for perpetual care, not even bird droppings on the stone. I thought of sitting or lying down on the grass but I'm too old for that; I don't lie down except to sleep. I'd ought to be getting back home to work on my history, so I got on the bike and pedaled for town. The road is mostly level so it's not hard.

In the casket, Gray had a wide frown, and his skin was like soft weathered wood. Just before the viewing I laid a hand on one of his feet in its knitted slipper, not like bone under flesh but one thing, almost solid. I gripped a little but I thought it couldn't leave a dent. I've been writing my personal history every Sunday, but the story is more about Gray and the boys than about me.

Dust billowed up down the road near the packing house. A truck was coming. I didn't think anything about it, till a minute later it was coming straight at me not making room to pass, first just a blur and then sharp, every little thing. My feet pushed the pedals. I watched the blue hood glaring, the grill shining, the high axle under the wide bumper. I felt calm and careless. That was what scared me, it's what jerks my backbone now when I think of it: me not caring about it coming. I yanked the handlebars and went into the gravel shoulder. The bike tipped over and I fell astraddle of it on my hands and knees in dry weeds. A handlebar stuck me in the ribs. The face behind the windshield hadn't even turned to watch, I was sure. My head hummed and my eyes went dark and I squinted and my shins and hands and knees started to sting.

In a minute or two I could stand, but I shook so when I brushed myself off that I missed my pant legs a couple times and laughed. I'd scrubbed a little hole right through one polyester knee. One spoke in the front wheel was broken out, but I twisted it onto another one and

made it back home all right. I changed clothes and washed where I'd scraped myself raw. I was going to have some bad bruises that would take time to turn green and fade, one inside my thigh where I must have hit myself on the pedal and not even felt it. After I was cleaned up I didn't know what to do. I knew whose truck it was.

* * *

I lay on the bed with the blinds down. We almost always kept them that way so the room was cool in the day and the blinds lit up pear-colored. I ran my hands down the chenille spread, across the rough, soft ridges. The bed felt wide and I closed my eyes. The first year we slept in this room, we had the old bed that is downstairs now for the boys and their wives when they come home. Sometimes in the nights when they visit I think I hear the headboard bump the wall. We'd been married nearly nine years when Gray got the house built and we moved in. We lived on the farm and I had Jared. Gray was with me and said afterward he didn't want me ever to have to go through that again, and he kept away from me a long time—eleven years and one miscarriage till we had Carl. Even when Gray couldn't go on that way he was always careful. That part was never much to me either way; not something to just put up with and not think about, but I didn't understand how a man was.

One night I came back in this room from the bathroom and got into bed. It was summer, the sashes and blinds were up so what air there was could come through, and in full moonlight I looked at Gray uncovered and sleeping. He breathed light and slow. He shone. I leaned above him and laid my hand on the hill of his chest, then slid it down the smooth hair streaming to his belly, to where it coarsened. He didn't wake. Something took hold and grew up in me to a hollowing that flared from my feet to my head. It shamed me. I judged it lust and refused it, and turned and pulled the sheet to my chin. Then it was loss so large I couldn't carry it.

The Sunday afternoon I came home and found him in the spare room slumped like a sack of wheat between the wall and his dad's roll-top, it went like a hot thin knife cutting me in two: he was gone. There was a little nick on his forehead just above the bridge of his nose, and one thin line of blood running down over his cheek to near the corner of his mouth, a frown. He hit his head falling. The blood was stopped but still bright. I was sure he was gone but I called our neighbor who's

on the ambulance team. He listened with a stethoscope and said there was nothing.

Gray had told me, "I'll be here when you get back." I'd put a roast and carrots and potatoes in the oven and told him I would just go down to the church to take my Relief Society roll in Fast Meeting and have the Sacrament and maybe hear some of the testimonies. I'd be back soon and he wouldn't need to fuss with anything, just stay put and rest. He was lying on the bed then in his robe and slippers and he said, "Oh, I'll be here when you get back."

I was hearing that and seeing him propped up by the desk frowning when they wheeled him into the ambulance and put an oxygen mask on his face, and while the bishop drove me twenty miles to the hospital. There I saw things I wasn't supposed to, through glass windows in the double doors. I saw them pounding on his chest and pushing a long needle straight into him. It wouldn't work, he was gone and I knew it. They said they wanted to be sure they tried everything, but what was left? The obituary said he died in the hospital, but when I had copies sealed in plastic I told the company to change it to died at home.

Things like this kept coming while I lay on the bed. Orin Hansen, our mortician, came up after he'd got him ready and told us, "He was a handsome man, he had a beautiful body." Oh I could remember that; but then also the seams of the operation scars dividing him, two for his heart, three for the cancer. I had watched God grind him fine as sand and huff him away.

My mind was nothing but the dim room. I must have slept. There was a bump like somebody kicked the foundation of the house, the way a man knocks dried mud off his heel, and I swear I heard him say, "You bet." I sat up and said "What?" But there was just the house and Sunday afternoon and my heart working. The things that happen to love.

* * *

I got up and walked outside to do something, I don't know what, in a kind of daze but acting like I knew what I was up to. It was just starting to get dark. Gray's truck, in my name now, was parked in his side of the garage. It's so wide I hardly dare to drive it in, and I don't trust myself to back it out; the boys use it when they come down. I went back past the garage to the door of the shop and walked in. I stood

looking at the mess and all the junk he'd pick up and never throw away, the tools on hooks on the pegboard. Each time the boys come home they haul off a barrel of trash, but it's still Gray's place where he collected and fixed things and made toy boats and swords for grand-kids and neighbor kids and puttered by himself. The boys had straightened some, but I felt like everything here was still where he last put it, and I almost wanted to just nail the door shut. It would take so long to clean it, longer than you want to live.

I took hold of the thick handle of a ball-peen hammer lying on the workbench and lifted it and knew if I turned around he'd be standing there behind me, between me and the doorway. I could feel him smiling in the air and I couldn't stand the expectation of it, the awful rise of joy. I swung the hammer down hard on the vise. My hand stung and the ringing yelped out of the room and thinned away.

I hung the hammer on the pegboard, walked out and closed the door. I'd make Dick Harris account for himself. He lives not a block down our street in the house his folks used to own, where his mother lived after her husband died. Widows—you can count their houses on our side of the street three blocks to the highway, widow after widow. Harris's yard has too many trucks and cars and motorcycles driving on it and the grass is pounded into the dirt. Dick's blue four-wheel drive truck with fat tires was parked around the side. Going up the walk I had to step around a big-wheel with its front wheel worn through in one place. Just junk. The porch swing is gone and somebody's hung a fern on one of the hooks and forgets to water it. The wooden screen door sags so it won't close; the rusty screen bulges and splits where kids push it. The inside door was open and the air in the hall looked thick. The doorbell button is gone so I banged on the screen door frame and called.

"You, Dick! I know you're there."

In a minute he came. He stood in the hall in his undershirt and bare feet. "What do you want?" he said.

"Why did you run me off the road?"

"I never," he said, not even surprised.

"You did. I saw your truck and now it's parked right there. You ran me off the road."

"I never." He just stood there and looked at me.

"You did, Dick," I said. "I know it and you know it."

"No I never" was all he said.

* * *

No more answer than I get from that headstone. I can stare at it till I keel over and never learn the simple end of the story—when and yes or no. Not even the angel of death will tell me anything more than *Now*.

I came back home. I've got some certificates I'll cash in. I'll take a trip to see Joel in St. Louis. I've never been there. Some of the ladies at the temple want to go on a cruise to the Caribbean or Hawaii. Maybe I'll go and see some of those places. I've started cleaning out my closets and drawers so my daughters-in-law won't have that to do when I'm gone.

Brand

He designed it first as a boy
in dirt floors of sheds
after harvest, sketching
with the broken tine of a pitchfork;

later on fence posts
with his knife: a flat diamond
carved into wood with the raised,
closing four in the center.

Its registration comes: he orders the irons,
traces the *diamond-four*
in black and silver on the horse trailer
he's built and painted forest green.

For the next forty years he'll brand
his calves, he'll wrestle them down
when he's seventy. Forty generations of Holstein
and Hereford will carry on their coats

the faint welt *diamond-four*.
Branding will get old, aggravate arthritis,
but always it will fire
a certain pride to the surface

reminiscent of the first time,
packed in the corral with every round-up calf
and all his sons, the ropes, the canteen,
and the irons.

—Dixie Partridge



The Conveyor

by

Harlow Clark

He was standing at the bus stop on 45th Street eating the tuna fish sandwich with a nice slice of onion his wife had made him when the man in the faded fraying overcoat (drab even for olive-drab) came round the corner of the building, lifted the hinged lid on the garbage can and, indifferent to all the people waiting there, stuck his whiskers, arm, and half his torso into the garbage can to examine its contents, bring forth a large green apple ("Granny Smith, isn't it," he thought) with a bite out of it, a half-eaten hamburger, and a beer bottle with some liquid inside, which he drained at a swig.

He could imagine the man working his way down the Avenue, and wondered why he had turned onto 45th Street. He looked at the sandwich in his hand, regretted that he had started eating it. He didn't like to open the food his wife sent to work with him before he got to work. (And sometimes not after. "You didn't eat anything today. You want people to think I'm starving you?") It was too much like opening a canned good. That was bad luck, opening a can.

"You see, if you open your cans, then when you really need your food storage, it's not there. I'd rather use all the fresh stuff in the fridge first."

"Tough," his wife had said, putting the tuna fish can down on the counter, turning the wheel on the can opener.

He took another bite of the sandwich. "I could have given this to him if I hadn't started eating it."

Monday nights, family home evening around the fireplace. "How the Lord has blessed us," his mother would say. "All this food we have here. For some family in Vietnam this might be a feast, might last a week." She was talking about the quantity of food available, not the appetites of the people. His third grade teacher's brother was in Vietnam. "They have the camps all lit up at

nights. People try to sneak in to the garbage dump to scavenge for food. But they can't let them do that. They call out a warning then they open fire or throw a grenade or let the dogs loose." He couldn't remember what it was they did, just the image of people, children like himself, being terribly mutilated, because they might be carrying bombs. "The risk was too great."

He didn't suppose the Seattle merchants would start mining garbage cans or dumpsters, but he knew how bad for business, how dangerous, men like this were.

This sandwich might be a feast. He didn't suppose his mother had said that so often to make her children ashamed of eating (to state her own guilt, perhaps?), but it made him very conscious of the movement of his hand to his mouth as he took another bite of his wife's tuna fish sandwich.

There's another one in my bag, he could have that one, he thought. Instead he simply stood, eating, watching—as the girl in the Wilkinson Center had probably stood watching. Great place to explore, BYU, and he was fascinated, always, by what people threw away, both at curbside, and here in the cafeteria—apples and oranges, bags of french fries, unopened cartons of milk, all manner of food bought and paid for but not touched going down the long conveyor belt and through the hole in the wall, where it ran half the length of the huge dining room next to the cafeteria before coming out in the kitchen. How he wanted to climb onto the conveyor belt and through the hole in the wall, where it ran half the length of the huge dining room next to the cafeteria before coming out in the kitchen. How he wanted to climb onto the conveyor on his belly and ride that distance—the wall hollow all the way up to the balcony overlooking the dining room. What a place it would be to rise and shout for the Cougars of BYU.

With all the stealth he could muster, he snatched a bag of french fries, no, it wasn't french fries, he could never remember what it was, maybe some pickles or something someone hadn't wanted on their hamburger, and took it over to a booth, and ate it, the last bite of his sandwich, and stood there as if transfixed by the memory, unwilling to shame the man as the girl had shamed him when she took her plate to the conveyor belt, and handed him a bag of fries (oh, that was where the fries came in, always the fries), and a dime, saying, "You shouldn't take things from the conveyor, you could get sick you know. Buy yourself something." When she was out of sight, he had walked away from the table, leaving the fries untouched, and the guilty dime, even though he wanted it. But you have this other sandwich in your bag,

you just can't do nothing, he thought. He took the sandwich and handed it to the man. "I have this extra. You're welcome to it," and went back to where his briefcase stood waiting. The man turned his back, took a bite, then walked over to the garbage can, threw something in. He resisted the urge to go over and grab it out, felt anger at the older man, wanted to apologize to him. Instead he just stood there waiting for the bus, full of shame.

Where the Water Comes out of the Mountain

Back, past the owl barn
that wasn't there, except
in figment or ash; back,
past your black stab
into childhood—what hurt
you, who wasn't there;
past that, past and past
the worn quiet of stones,
where nothing occurs . . .

Listen; the moon
still willing in the pine:
follow it; in the burnt
leaf: it is there.

—Philip White

West

We were
stripped, brown
in the sun, natives
on the scrub
hill where
the brick Rambler
now glints (tinted
glass, cool
wicker-and-steel
shade). Once
the dust rose
here and children
(gunned down)
flailed like dead
Indians.
Someone yelled
king of the hill.

—Philip White

What the Magdalene Saw

In the middle of the night, I heard nails
go into the door (or was it the clock)
and thought, *what if I can't get out*, knowing
it wasn't a dream as a car pulled out
of the parking lot. I pulled the blinds

and saw the faces pressed against the glass.
Why can't I move my feet. The laces
turned to snakes as the moon began to rise
over the roofs, and I could see
my garden had been trampled. I swear

on the law and prophets that time stopped
as they entered through a broken pane.
I could no longer tell if there was good
or evil left in me. *We are the same,*
wanting you as much as we are wanted.

* * *

I heard a knock at the door (six a.m.).
I was afraid. *The nails.* I had no doubts
he was the one: he wore all their faces.

—Timothy Liu

"Nancy"

from

The River, The Rock

by

Michael Fillerup

Great men and mighty nations have fallen for the sake of a beautiful woman: Troy had Helen; David, Bathsheba; Samson his Delilah; Antony, Cleopatra. In my teenage mind, this was understandable, if not wholly redeemable. A pretty face, I reasoned, at least pays dividends in passion and prestige. What I couldn't understand was how someone like Nancy Von Kleinsmid did me under. Why, I felt like Robert Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises*. Poor Cohn, the minute he falls in love his tennis game goes to pot. I didn't fall in love with Nancy, but after meeting her I couldn't catch a pass or win a race. My once graceful body ignored my simplest commands. I said, "Leap!" and instead my legs crossed themselves and sent me sprawling on the grass. I said, "Relax, wait, concentrate," but my hands slapped crudely at the spiraling pigskin. Had I been witched by envious classmates? Had I contracted some rare dysfunctioning disease? Spinal meningitis maybe? One thing was certain: it wasn't Nancy's beauty that blurred my concentration on the flight of the ball or turned my legs to sponge-cake every time I crouched down in the starting blocks. Quite frankly, Nancy wasn't much to look at.

Keith called her "The Albino Watusi." Except for her hair (which was anything but Afro), the metaphor was perfect. Grotesquely tall and gangly, she was all arms, legs, and Adam's apple, a skeleton in Salvation Army hand-me-downs two decades out of style: plain white blouses and dark wool skirts, thick as kilts, that reached below her knobby knees. White gym socks sagged around her ankles and giant

Note: This is taken from Michael Fillerup's upcoming novel, tentatively titled *The River, The Rock*. Michael has previously published a book of short stories, *Visions and Other Stories*, Signature Books, 1990.

"NANCY"

saddle shoes bound her size thirteen feet. While her female classmates sheathed their nubile legs in pantyhose or fishnet stockings, she left hers bare—shapeless, sexless, a little girl's. Oh, she was aloof, she was strange, she was sooooo different! If Ponderosa High had run a popularity contest, she wouldn't have won a single vote. Yet everyone knew Nancy Von Kleinsmid. You couldn't miss her: the coltish clatter of her oxfords as she marched down the hall with her books pressed to her chest as if trying to hide what little she had there, her feathered head bobbing above the crowd...

She was a mystery. No one seemed to know anything about her except that she had moved into our little pine tree town shortly after the Christmas holidays. Rumors were rampant. She looked like a refugee. Maybe her father was a Nazi war criminal on the run? The name fit, didn't it? Von Kleinsmid? Keith's explanation was more astute. "She's a freak of nature," he proclaimed on more than one occasion. He had a point—he always did. Her feathered mop was such a bizarre combination of blond tones and textures that (with a little imagination, elongating her neck while abstracting the bush from her head and fastening it around her hips) she could have passed for a Picasso rendition of an ostrich.

I met her officially in mid-March of my senior year. I'd just been notified that if I didn't raise my grade in Trigonometry from an F to a D- I'd be ineligible for the league track finals in May. This is not to say I was your typical dumb jock. True, I was numbered among the student athletes (okay, the jocks, the jocks!). I was even considered something of a sports prodigy, especially after plucking a Hail Mary pass out of the hands of four enemy defenders to give Ponderosa High its first league title in twenty-two years. As a result, I had a fat head. My teammates liked to say Riddel didn't stock a helmet big enough for Jon Reeves. I was also vain (blue eyes, blond hair). Arrogant. Obnoxious. Selfish. Spoiled.

But dumb? My cumulative grade point average was a respectable three-point-two. At the time, I was earning A's or B's in all my other classes, including Senior Comp and Chemistry. But Trigonometry was another matter. I simply couldn't psyche myself up to sit and listen to Mr. Gilbert, the ex-World War II storm trooper, ramble on about parachutes and parabolas for an hour every afternoon—not with the obliging spring weather and the River only a few miles away. Plus I was lazy. Things that didn't come naturally took a back seat in my life. Math had always been my back seat subject.

So that sunny afternoon when I checked into the Student Tutoring Center, I was desperate. My back was to the wall. Coach Ramirez had

banned me from the track until I brought my grade up. No meets, no practices, no nada. Unwittingly, I had secured for myself an indefinite string of free afternoons, giving further credence to the Sunday School axiom, "God works in mysterious ways." More on that later.

I was the lone client, which was a relief in some ways, humiliating in others. Mrs. Larson, the grandmotherly program sponsor, directed me to a tall, gawky girl with her face buried in a book. Grinning like a lucky matchmaker, she leaned my way and whispered, as if we two were now privy to some intimate secret, "That's Nancy Von Kleinsmid. She's a straight-A student. I'm sure she'll be able to help you."

The introduction was unnecessary. I'd recognized her immediately: the saggy socks, the tugboat shoes, the dowel-like legs . . . Who but Nancy Von K?

My instincts screamed, "Run! Flee! Get the hell out!" But I believe I felt sorry for her. She looked so lonely sitting at that big deserted table, like a traveler lost in time. So I took a seat and waited patiently for her to explain sines and cosines, roots, squares, coefficients, the precarious alchemy of numbers.

At first she continued reading, oblivious to my presence. Her book was as fat as Webster's Unabridged. I noted the title: *Finnegan's Wake*. Five minutes passed.

"Excuse me," I said.

The book dropped; her back stiffened. Snatching the returned test paper from my hand (fifty-two was the score), she cracked open my algebra text and, without introducing herself or asking my name, zeroed in on the topic for the day: logarithmic functions and limits.

"Okay," she ordered, "take out a sheet of paper!"

Before I could open my loose-leaf binder, she was drilling me like a Marine Corps sergeant.

"How do you find the terms of the Fibonacci sequence?"

"What's the inverse of the tangent function?"

"What are the formulas for the double angle identities? The half angles?"

As I worked on the first problem, she barked more orders. "Come on! Come on! Faster! Faster!"

Yanking the paper out from under my pencil, she scribbled out the step-by-step solution and thrust it back at me. "There! Now try number four! And remember, speed is the key. Quick-pronto-fast!"

I made a feeble attempt at number four.

"Too slow! Too slow!" Her bony fist hammered the table. "Just like yesterday in the mile relay!"

Surprised, I stopped my work. "You mean—"

"Yes, yes. I saw the meet. How could you let that blunder-butt from Las Plumas catch you from behind? And on the anchor leg!"

"That blunder-butt," I said, squaring my shoulders, "just happens to be Harold Robinson, alias Harry the Horse, who just happens to hold the Mid-Valley League record for the quarter-mile."

"I don't care if he holds Tricky Dick Nixon by the g-string. He still caught you from behind."

"Well, yesterday wasn't one of my better performances."

"Better performances! I've seen brittle old coots in the convalescent home put on a better show than that. Reeves, you ran like you had—one-two-three-four-five-six—six corn cobs!" (She enumerated each corn cob with a bony finger.)

I was stunned to silence. Other girls would jokingly tease me about my fumbles and mishaps on the field, but other girls had shapely thighs and flashbulb smiles. Where did this Nancy Von Nobody get off criticizing me? Still in shock, my only counter was a meek, "How do you figure six?"

"Look at the films. You'll see. Yuki!"

She slammed the textbook shut and, glaring at me with incriminating blue eyes, asked—nay, accused: "Tell me, do you really enjoy putting on a helmet and tromping around beating the mucus out of your fellow human beings every Friday night from Labor Day till Thanksgiving? I mean, is this your idea of fun, achievement, personal growth, etcetera?"

I hemmed and hawed and before I realized it we were engaged in a knock-down-drag-out over the morality of contact sports. I'll spare you the shameful details. Suffice it to say that she cleaned my clock. Kicked ass, to quote Coach Ramirez. And for some bizarre (masochistic?) reason, I enjoyed it, or at least I was sufficiently intrigued by it, or her, to stick around for a full fifty-five minutes of verbal punishment.

There are points in time where you make split-second decisions that have lifelong, perhaps even eternal, consequences. I would make at least four such decisions in Nancy's company, but this next was the most pivotal because it started the ball rolling, so to speak; because otherwise I surely would have walked out of that room at session's end and never returned, leaving my fate in Algebra II to my own devices, and Nancy Von Kleinsmid to hers. Instead, I turned to her and said, "Let's get something to eat!"

As if she'd had a dozen such offers, she shrugged and sighed condescendingly, "Oh, all right . . ."—Seconds later the bell rang. Nancy

leaped to her feet and with one swoop gathered up her books and mine, grabbed my wrist with her free hand, and dragged me out the door.

"Whoa! Whoa!" I cried. "Where's the fire?"

She gave my arm another tug. "Kick it in the gas, Reeves, or we won't beat the stampede!"

I looked down the hall at the mass of sweaty, urgent bodies rushing to lockers, busses, choir practice, the baseball field. The "stampede" had never bothered me before, but Nancy's sense of urgency made it seem as if the entire student body were an angry mob converging on us with intent to main or kill.

"Reeeeeeeves!" she cried, giving my arm another yank.

I shadowed her lanky body across the grassy quad. Gaining the parking lot, she paused, hands on narrow hips, breathing deeply, the grin of victory on her face as she watched the student exodus moseying along like a human traffic jam. Standing beside her, I realized how tall she truly was. I stood a shade under six-four, yet my eyes were tilting upward to meet hers.

"Okay," she said, glancing around, "so where's your jalopy?"

"My jalopy?" I almost laughed. My red Corvette was the most coveted vehicle in town. "Over there," I said, pointing to the giant ruby shining in the far corner of the parking lot.

Nancy shrugged. "A Ford, eh?"

Now I did laugh. "No, a Corvette Stingray."

"Ford, Corvette—what's the diff?"

Was she trying to rattle my cage again, or was she simply naive in the material ways of the world? I honestly couldn't tell. She was wearing an indifferent smirk that annoyed me in some respects but enticed me in others. I think I was beginning to like her. She was a refreshing change from the drooling beauties who stroked the red enamel of my car as if it were alive.

Five feet short she stopped and eyed my prize skeptically. "You know what Ralph Nader says about Corvettes?"

"Sorry, I'm not very hep on the consumer reports."

She shook her head, tsksking. "Death traps. Real death traps."

"More power to Ralph," I said. "Get in."

We drove in silence down Terrace Road and onto the Skyway, north past the oak-shaded cemetery and the felt-green lawns of Veteran's Memorial Park where old men in suspenders were pitching horseshoes as miniskirted teenyboppers paraded by en route to the A&W; then on past the dead daylight neon of the Silver Buckle Bar and the ominous

escutcheon of the Moose Lodge; left on Star Route, past Mel's A-frame barber shop and the buzzing machinery of Moonbeam Construction, then a long green wall of pines abruptly broken by a red desert studded with tree stumps. COMING SOON! PONDEROSA SHOPPING CENTER! read the billboard.

"All those beautiful trees," Nancy muttered.

"Progress is progress," I said, baiting her.

"Or regress. It looks like a graveyard. All those little headstones..."

We drove a ways in silence.

"Where are we headed?"

"The Double-Eagle," I said, noting her expression. There was no change. Either she had never heard of the place (highly unlikely) or it made no difference to her where we ate. Double-Eagle, Foster Freeze—what's the diff? I don't know what good spirit prompted me to choose the Double-Eagle. In retrospect, though, Nancy deserved the best because, in her mind, "the best" was no big deal.

And the Double-Eagle was about Ponderosa's best. By that I mean it was the only establishment that strived for any atmosphere beyond bland hospital walls and salt and pepper table settings. The exterior looked like a splintering old shack from the Gold Rush days: hitching rails and wagon wheels. A wooden Indian met you grimly at the door. Inside, you walked on sawdust past hefty tables of lacquered pine surrounded by wood-paneled walls draped with chaps, spurs, branding irons, WANTED posters, Winchesters, lariats. Suntanned students from Chico State drained pitchers of beer as Iron Butterfly and Ten Years After blasted from the juke box. Fat beef patties sizzled on the open grill; smoke swirled delectably into the dim-lit rafters. It was a status symbol to come here and mingle with the college crowd, but weaving through the mass of half-naked bodies (cut-off jeans, halter tops, hirachi sandals), Nancy looked thoroughly unimpressed.

I ordered my usual junk food special: double-cheeseburger deluxe on an onion roll, a large order of fries, and a jumbo Coke. Nancy ordered a tuna salad sandwich on twelve-grain bread ("Hold the mayonnaise") and a glass of milk.

"You forgot your wheat germ and sprouts," I quipped.

She didn't smile or retaliate. She waited until we were seated and then very calmly proceeded to lecture me on the nutritional value of our respective orders, comparing caloric intake, carbohydrate and protein gram ratios, and U.S.R.D.A. vitamin surpluses.

"What you have there," she said, gesturing to my junk food-laden tray, "is the Triple-Bypass-Special!"

"Amen!" I cried, raising my burger as if to toast it. "No sprouts or sunflower seeds for this Jose! Long live the double-cheeseburger deluxe!"

"On an onion roll," she murmured.

"Definitely an onion roll."

Nancy sprinkled a bit of salt on her sandwich while I gobbled extra mustard and mayonnaise on my double-beef patties.

"Easy on the salt," I said. "I hear it causes hemorrhoids."

"Actually it's quite harmless—in moderation. Most things are. Just steer clear of the white sugar and white flour and you'll be okay." She aimed an accusing finger at my jumbo Coke.

"You never eat sugar? No ice cream, no cake, no cookies with your milk?"

"Not if I can avoid it."

I was impressed and appalled. "But what do you do . . . for pleasure? I mean, what is life without an occasional sugar fix?" I said it jokingly but I was serious. What did someone like Nancy Von Kleinsmid do for enjoyment? She wasn't into sports; she had no friends, no car. She couldn't even get high on sweets.

"Try honey," she said.

"Honey?"

She then expounded on the evils of refined sugar, how it, rather than eggs and animal fat, was the real culprit in the cholesterol war, how its overuse would eventually result in diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer, sterility, baldness, impotency . . .

Here I grew bold and challenged her. "Excuse me, but if diet is really the key to health, beauty, and happiness, how come someone like Annette Plikta, who lives on cafeteria casseroles and Milk Duds, also looks like Miss Universe?"

"She'd be Miss Universe if she ate right!" Case closed—in her mind. But this reasoning only made me wonder what this Albino Watasi with the whiplike tongue would have evolved into if she hadn't been nourished on whole-wheat and honey. Several images flashed through my mind; all made me shiver.

I wolfed down my meal in seconds. She pieced at hers, nibbling like a squirrel. Every bite, every swallow, was slow, exact, disciplined. Her lips made none of the smacking sounds typical of after-school snacking. Even the crisp lettuce remained silent to the calculated incisions of her teeth.

A quarter of her sandwich remained when she dabbed her napkin to her lips and neatly folded it up for good. My Depression-bred father

had taught me to always clean my plate, so I went after her on that account. "Waste not, want not," I said, pointing to her uneaten portion. "Kids are starving in Biafra."

"Of course they are. And in Bangladesh and in our very own backyards. But how does eating beyond my present needs feed them?"

"I don't follow."

"Your body's not a trash receptacle!" she said, gathering up our used napkins, paper cups, and plastic utensils. "Excuse me."

I watched in amazement and, admittedly, admiration, as her rangy body glided towards the trash barrel with the hyperextended grace of a basketball player. However, my teenage brain couldn't help evaluating her on the one-to-ten scale Keith and I had devised our junior year. According to this criteria, only one girl at Ponderosa High earned a perfect ten: Annette Plikta, the future Miss Universe. I believe I rated Nancy one-point-five.

"Thanks," she said, retaking her seat. "That was good." She smiled—a warm smile this time, genuine. Give her a two-point-two. She had fine white teeth and a nice face—plain but pleasant. Freckles lightly sprinkled her narrow nose.

"Ready?" I asked.

"Let's vamoose!"

As we drove north on Star Route, Nancy sat low in the bucket seat, the window down, her eyes almost shut and her head tilted so the wind blew her hair straight back in a raging Beethoven mane. Her small mouth was clamped tight, almost haughtily, her deprived nostrils sucking in the warm March air. Her eyebrows were pale etchings resisting the force of the wind. Something about the way she sat there, arms folded, eyes closed, hair blowing back, gave her the confident, self-possessed look of a movie star. Her expression said, This is nothing out of the ordinary, driving through the mountains in a red sports car with the captain of the football team. Why, she even looked bored. I was beginning to feel a little self-conscious.

"So what does your father do?" I asked, trying to make conversation, but curious as well.

One blue eye popped open, then the other. "Sleeps," she said.

I laughed. "Mine too. Not much, though. He's an M.D."

"Permanently," she said.

"Oh . . . I'm sorry."

"Somewhere," she added.

If she was teasing, I couldn't tell. She remained perfectly poker-faced.

"How about your mother, what does she do?"

"Everything."

I nodded. "Cooks, sews, cleans, washes . . ."

"No. Not that."

"You said everything."

"Everything but that."

This was getting nowhere. When I asked where she was from, her eyes got big and round. "A galaxy far, far away," she said in a quavering outer space voice. This was fifteen years before the Stars Wars phenomenon.

"Any brothers or sisters?" I asked—a last ditch try for a straight answer.

"More than one, less than a dozen. Nine's fine but ten's the end." She looked at me and smiled. "I'm quoting Cervantes—or Mother Goose. What about you—no, don't tell me: you're an only child."

"How did you—"

"Pampered, egocentric, stuck up . . . You've got all the symptoms."

"And I suppose you're the oldest?"

She cringed. "Does it show that badly?"

I mulled this over. Her face was no longer coiled to strike but had softened. It really was a very nice face, even with that rigid German jaw. Her tongue was bold and sassy but her lips were meek and reticent, a lamb's. Try three-point-four.

"Not at all," I said.

"Not at all no or not at all badly?"

"Both."

Her head flew back with a laugh as her fist hit the dash. "Both! Reeves, you ought to be a politician!"

"Me?"

"Sure! You've got the face for it! The All-American smile!" Her voice lowered a decibel, to a tone of pseudo-seriousness. Adding a nasal twang, she mimicked perfectly Mrs. Barsumian, Ponderosa High's Girls Vice Principal. "And just what do you plan to do with your life, Mr. Reeves?"

Thus commenced the first of our many mock interviews. I gladly played along.

"Seriously? My secret ambition is to be a fireman or a cowboy, although lately I've had this uncontrollable urge to become a lazy degenerate beachcomber. That, or the King of Siam."

"And next year, Mr. Reeves? College?"

"If it tastes good, yes. I'll order two. With a jumbo Coke, of course."

"I understand you've been offered a football scholarship to Brigham Young University."

"Yes, representatives from the outstanding institution of higher ideals and lower athletics have offered to feed me, clothe me, wine—"

"Wine you, Mr. Reeves? At a Mormon school?"

"Okay, milk me—milk me? That sounds . . ."

"Somewhat obscene, Mr. Reeves?"

"Obscene! That's the word!"

Nancy had a way of bringing out my dormant dimensions. This type of repartee was one. Later she would take me to far more dangerous depths.

"Begging your pardon, Mr. Reeves, but do you have any earthly idea where we're heading?"

As a matter of fact, I did. At first we were just going, driving. But partway through our little interview I had made another one of those split-second decisions of potentially eternal import, and had turned off the main highway. We were now winding down the chuck-holed dirt road leading to the River. The sun was low in the west, melting like butter on the horizon. Its glow had a wavering effect on the pines, which appeared as tall green flames stretching into the sky. A tiny flock of clouds blushed overhead.

"So what about you?" I asked. "College?"

Her voice shifted back to normal. "Nope. I'm a victim of Von Kleinsmid's First Law of Economics: no dough, no can go."

I tried to look sympathetic, but this was not news. Ten years behind the times—most Ponderosans took a job right out of high school. College was a low-priority frill for rich doctors' kids.

"No college. Well, maybe someday."

She shrugged. "No big deal."

But then it grew very quiet in my Corvette, the only sounds the snapping of twigs and branches as we crawled down the bumpy dirt road. The silence, plus the strobic effect of the sunlight flickering through the pines, made me feel like an extra in a silent movie with a sad ending. This mood persisted until we were fifty yards from the final bend.

"Stop!" Nancy screamed.

I slammed on the brakes. The car screeched to a halt, heaving both of us forward. No harm to us, but I winced as I sniffed the burned rubber mingling with the vermilion cloud of dust billowing up around us like

an incensed genie. They were brand new radials, those tires, and I had just washed and waxed my red gem.

"So where's the accident that was about to happen!" I yelled. "Where's the water buffalo I was going to rear-end?"

Nancy wasn't listening. She was staring quietly across the canyon as if trying to dissolve the sun with her eyes. She was doing a spectacular job, too, for the only remnant now was a marmalade stain on the horizon. She waited five minutes, until the orange glow had turned fluorescent pink, then motioned me on.

At the bottom we were greeted by the sound of distant thunder. We got out of the car and followed the noise down a narrow trail, flanked by waist-high ferns, to the edge of a granite cliff. A jungle of trees and plants, many of them exotic to the region, crowded the opposite bank. Directly below us the waters lay still and smooth, black satin. A sweet and sour odor rose from the sandy shore.

Several hundred feet downstream a steel trestle spanned the River. In the early moonlight, it looked like a great metal cage with a dull polish. Just upstream, the opposing cliffs curved abruptly inward forming a giant horseshoe. Top-dead-center, the upper River squeezed through a narrow gap and plunged twenty feet straight down, crashing between a pair of deadly boulders that angled inward like twin whales surfacing to kiss. This was the Rock. If you had hair on your chest or rocks in your head or both, and aimed yourself just right, you could squeeze safely between those two protruding boulders. And if you leaped and lived, you were entitled to carve your initials into the naked trunk of a half-gone ponderosa pine rotting at the base, officially certifying your manhood or your stupidity. Or both.

Before long a squadron of bats began zig-zagging above the River. Intermittently one would dive kamikaze-style at the water only to pull out an instant before crash-landing, its leather wings fluttering frenetically as it rejoined the group.

"Do you think they ever misjudge?" Nancy asked.

"And hit the water? I don't know. Maybe once in awhile. They're hunting for insects, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"If they ever misjudge, it's not often," I said. "They're equipped with a sort of built-in radar, you know. So it's pretty hard for them to misjudge."

Nancy crossed her arms and watched with an ambivalent look, as if she were anticipating yet dreading an aerial miscue. Then she smiled. "They never miss!" she exclaimed. "Never!"

I looked around anxiously. Directly overhead stars were freckling the sky; the sickle moon was a big white smile, grinning at me no doubt. I gazed up at the towering canyon walls, which appeared to be closing like immense jaws that would soon swallow moon, stars, everything.

"You're Mormon, aren't you?"

"Yes." She already knew that: Brigham Young University. Football scholarship. "What are you?"

She laughed. "I'm Nancy. Nancy Von Kleinsmid."

"I know that. But what are you? What religion, I mean?"

She looked aside, smiling smugly. "So tell me about God."

"God?" I was cautious and suspicious. She was setting me up again.

"Sure! What does God look like?"

"He looks like a man," I said.

"Oh does he? Then tell me, Reeves, what kind of a man? Does he have a mustache? A beard? What color? Is he a red man? A black man? A white man? A yellow man? Or does he maybe change colors like a chameleon, to fit the occasion?"

"He's got a body like a man. We're created in his image—two arms, two legs, two eyes, one nose not six."

I was dreading her logical next question.

"Tell me, Reeves, I'm a woman. If we're all created in *his* image..."

"We'd better get going," I said.

Either she didn't hear me or didn't want to. She gazed downstream smiling in her annoyingly omnipotent way. At least she was calling off the dogs on the subject of religion—for the time being anyway. "Why do they call it the River?" she asked. "I mean, doesn't it have a real name? Like Mulligan's River or Red River or some nifty Indian name, like the Watahmahogie River?"

"I don't know. Why do you ask?"

"Just curious."

Maybe, but her voice had that mocking edge again. I got defensive. First my running style, then my car, then my diet, then my religion, and now this! The River wasn't exactly a secret spot, but to me it had always been a very special one. Ever since my ninth summer when my father hiked me down the switchbacks to catch and clean my first rainbow trout, it had been my refuge—a little piece of paradise in the pines. Water nymphs might have bathed here, or those Polynesian beauties you see in paintings by Gauguin. I'd brought Nancy here because I thought she was special too. Had I thrown my pearls to the swine?

"No," I said, still smarting from our Jonathan-God discussion. "No, it doesn't. Why should it?"

"The River—as if there were no others. Don't you find that a little pretentious?"

"No. Not at all."

She looked upriver, where the shawl of falling water glistened in the skimpy moonlight. "And that's the infamous Rock?"

"The Rock, yes."

"Have you ever jumped?"

"Sure. Lots of people have . . . Everyone's jumped."

"Excuse me, O Great and Mighty One, my unpardonable indiscretion. But of course."

She scrutinized the Rock with her all-knowing smirk. "Has anyone ever dived?"

"And lived to tell about it? Only two I know of, and one of them's in a wheelchair."

"Have you?"

A sudden breeze swept through the canyon, chasing off the fallen leaves and ruffling the River's surface like the fur of a frightened animal.

"No," I said.

"Will you?"

"Dive?"

"Please."

"Now what kind of question is that, knowing what happened to Steve Valkenburg?"

"A very straightforward one, I think."

"Okay, and here's a very straightforward answer. N-O. No."

"Why not?"

"Don't be stupid."

Another breeze came up, this one a bit stiffer, shaking the surrounding oaks and elms. Their porous silhouettes wriggled like schools of black fish. It was an eerie, oriental image.

"Will you jump?" she asked.

"I already have."

"I mean today. Now." She smiled. "For me."

"Are you some kind of screwball?"

"No, I'm Nancy," she whispered. "Nancy Von Kleinsmid. You've done it before."

"I've got my good clothes on," I said, motioning to my preppy polo shirt and corduroy pants.

"So? Take them off."

"Very funny!"

"Mormon boys don't do that?" Something about her smile—that smirk, that challenge.

"Okay, Miss Big Shot," I said, "why don't you jump!"

"I can't swim."

Now it was my turn to smirk. "Let's go," I said.

I started back for the Corvette, smiling victoriously as I listened to her footsteps trailing behind. Suddenly they stopped. "Listen!" she said.

It took a moment, but soon I could hear the sound of another waterfall, like an echo of the first. But instead of staying constant, it was growing louder, closer.

Nancy's eyes widened. "Come on!" she said, and grabbed my wrist with the same urgency she had shown in the high school parking lot, evading the mob.

I was a good runner, a dash man, but I had trouble keeping up. Her ostrich mop was shaking like a pom-pom as her oxfords pounded the dirt. "They say," she panted, "they say there's a good foot of clearance . . . maybe two."

"What?" I yelled. "What?"

She stopped at the mouth of the trestle. It protruded out of the tunnel on the far side like a piece of complex dental work.

"It's like a skeleton!" she said. "The skeleton of the tunnel!"

To me it looked like a giant booby trap.

"Nancy," I said, but she was already striding along the ladder of railroad ties, skipping every other one.

"Come on!" she hollered. And I did.

Midway she stopped and lay down lengthwise on the tracks.

"What are you doing?" I said. "Are you nuts!"

The noise grew louder, closer. Somewhere upstream a dam had burst and the angry waters were rushing down to bury us.

"Hurry, Jon!" She patted the rail impatiently.

"Get up!" I yelled. "It's not funny!"

"Come on, Jon!"

The mouth of the tunnel filled with light; the steel cage trembled.

"Jonathan!" she screamed. "You're going to miss it!" Such urgency. I could see the veins gripping her throat like a skinny strangling hand. "Jon!"

What I did next I still frightens me. I obediently laid my body back-flat on the tracks, my head at her feet.

"This is crazy!" I screamed.

"Shhhh!"

Were those my bones rattling, or the wooden ties underneath me? I closed my eyes and said a quick and desperate prayer. Then: "A foot—are you sure?"

She laughed. "Just keep your head down!" She yelled something else, but her voice was smothered by the thunder.

Then I did something that a moment later would have been even more stupid than laying my body down on the tracks. I raised my head and looked back: the cyclops eye was hurtling towards us, splashing yellow light all over the steel cage. Panicking, I rolled over the rail, off the track. Eyes clenched, I hugged the metal bar, riding the earthquake tremors as the hissing, pounding monster roared past. I began counting to myself and didn't stop until the very last echoes had faded and nothing remained but the perfect silence you might expect after a bomb has fallen and the smoke has cleared.

I opened my eyes and sat up, but suddenly I felt very cold. My hands were shaking.

"Nancy?"

She was lying perfectly still, ghost-white in the moonlight, her hands cupped restfully on her concave belly, a mortician's perfect pose.

"Nancy!"

I scrambled over and, kneeling, lifted her head onto my lap. Her eyes opened slowly, then her mouth, although nothing came out at first. She gazed up at me dreamily, as if she were the beauty in the fairy tale awakening from her hundred year's sleep. Then with a look of extreme sadness and disappointment, she whispered, "You missed it, Jon. You missed the train."

I held those words for several moments. They almost seemed to echo back and forth between the canyon walls which became the sides of my head. I was angry. Furious. I think I started yelling at her. Or maybe I just got up and stomped off. I forget.

She ran after me, though. "Hey! Wait up! I'm sorry!" she said, grabbing my arm. "I guess I get a little carried away sometimes."

I spun around, fists clenched. I felt like punching her I was so mad. I felt as if I were standing stark naked in front of her, hanging out all over. "A little carried away? A little?"

"Okay, a lot carried away. A whole big bunch stupid idiotic carried away. I'm sorry, Jon. Really." She was pleading with her hands.

"Some joke! Real funny! I hope you proved whatever the hell it was you were trying to prove because what you did . . . Just who do you

think you are, anyway?" Then I realized I was shaking my finger at her, just like an adult scolding a little kid. "That was really really really stupid!"

"I know," she said, looking penitently at her feet. "I'm really really really really sorry."

I thought she was being sarcastic again, but then I noticed she was about to cry. She was trying to hide it, but I could tell she wanted to. So then I felt rotten for almost making her cry.

"Look," I said, "it's getting late, it's dark. Let's get the hell out of here."

We walked back to the Corvette side by side, almost but not quite touching. Soon she seemed okay again, her old chatty, sassy self. She told me about the stories she was writing and how she was going to win the Nobel Prize for Literature someday. I said that that was a pretty ambitious goal.

"Shoot for the stars!" Robert Browning said!" and she aimed a quick finger at the white buckshot spotting the night.

Then it grew quiet again. The perpetual thunder had softened to the roar of a distant crowd. I remember the brittle pine needles crackling underneath her giant shoes, the night sighs of the River, and the friction of her pleated skirt swishing across her skinny, sexless thighs.

Tattoo

In church accidentally
I happened to glance
At a succulent leg down the aisle.
Well turned though it was
What I saw there upon
Caused a sudden spontaneous smile.

On the side of the calf
Just south of the knee
Colored red and bordered in blue

Poised a sweet decoration
For clear observation
a cute little heart-shaped tattoo.

Most needlework artists
I've heard it maintained
Will not etch on the face or the hand

But it troubles me some
To behold illustration
On those of the feminine gland.

Those anchors and eagles
The star spangled banners
Your Harleys and cupids and "Moms"

Belong on the muscles
The torsos and backs
Of your Harrys and Richards and Toms.

I took pause to ponder
An unpleasant dilemma
Concerning my daughter fifteen

If she came home engraved
Where would it be worse,
In a place usually hidden or seen?

—K. Randall Kimball

The Dionysian Hierarchy First Notices Moroni and His Friends

Wing-warped angels pause, look askance
at wingless forms new formed,
hover-clustering beneath a sterile

moon. They pause, deign a glance
from heaven's Seventh Sphere,
and murmur: "Latecomer Imps! Puerile

afterthoughts! Scrabbling for a chance
encounter with Mortality!"
They pause, and flare sheer wings with feral

grace—not noticing that their Cosmic Dance
stutters to a vacuous close . . .
forgetting metaphor to their mythic peril.

—Michael Collins

Primavera

Between wide blue of sky and blue of sea
Green threads curl dun shores,
Curl, curve, twist, and curl again,

Web winter's fissured, fractured skin,
And marry solitary strands that—lonely—
Endured the ice. First green knots

Its web, inseminates cold crystal soil
Bright to bright . . . coiling, wreathing rounds
That weave the womb-rose resting at its core.

—Michael Collins



Companionship

by

Valerie Holladay

In some indefinable but definite way I had known when I was sixteen that I would serve a mission. At twenty I asked Bishop Veach to take my mission papers early; he just laughed and told me to come back when I was twenty-one. He did let me put in my papers two months early, and I entered the MTC just after my twenty-first birthday. I had already memorized the first discussion in English and read Talmage's *Jesus the Christ* and *Articles of Faith*. I also attended three different missionary prep classes, using *Tools for Missionaries* and *Drawing on the Powers of Heaven* as my scriptures. I felt absolutely prepared for my mission.

In the MTC, although some elders complained they had never studied so much, I enjoyed the twelve-hour days. In fact, since I wanted to learn all seven discussions, I got up at 4:00 A.M. to gain two extra hours of study. My companion and I enthusiastically began the SYL—Speak Your Language—rule. We spoke only French, except for our weekly companion inventory; we even gave our personal prayers in French. Laughingly we used our “caveman” French as we announced our mail from home: “*Lettres, c’est bien*,” we said smiling. “*Manger*,” we said rubbing our stomachs before dinner. Food was the highlight of the day. “*Toilettes*,” we explained to each other the necessary but brief separations from our twenty-four-hour-a-day companions.

After four weeks in the MTC, my companion and I were joined by a third companion, a French sister going to Fiji who spoke easy and exquisite French. My MTC teacher told me that sisters never learned to speak as well as the elders because they were in France for only sixteen months, instead of twenty-two. I hoped the Spirit would make up for my deficiencies.

Although I had prayed in French for the first two weeks, I felt strangled by the simple formula I had been taught to use: *Notre Père Céleste, Nous te remercions. . . . Nous te demandons. . . . Au nom de Jésus Christ. Amen.* I didn't want to disregard the counsel of my leaders, but I couldn't talk to God in a language I didn't know. So guiltily I prayed in English. One morning as my companion got down from her bunk bed, I said distinctly, "Good morning. I'm speaking English because I'm going to go crazy if I don't. Please talk to me."

Immediately awake, she responded in English, "I feel the same way." Sister Gagnon, our companion, went to breakfast with two other sister missionaries and found us still talking when she returned.

* * *

In France I boarded the train to Bayonne, a little town in the southwest corner of France near Spain, with Elder Hamilton, my new district leader, and Elder Green from my MTC group. Elder Green reminded me of Cyrano de Bergerac with his large nose and his delicate manners. "It's so lovely," I marveled at the greenness of the landscape. Elder Green shared my enthusiasm, but Elder Hamilton read his scriptures silently, pausing only to say, "We get a lot of rain. You get used to it." The elderly French couple who shared our compartment studiously ignored us. But a missionary was bold, I knew. So I told them I was a missionary from America with an important message for them.

"*Nous sommes allés au Grand Canyon,*" the man said.

At my perplexed look, he repeated himself more slowly. The only recognizable words were "Grand Canyon."

"*Vous aimez le Grand Canyon?*" I asked cautiously. They both nodded and began talking at the same time, no doubt describing their trip to the United States although I wasn't sure. Elder Green looked at me in nervous admiration and Elder Hamilton just smiled but didn't join in. When we parted at the train station in Bayonne, my grandparents *adoptées*, as they had proclaimed themselves, kissed me on both cheeks in an affectionate French *bise*. I promised to come visit, realizing too late I didn't have their address.

As I stepped off the train, two elders came to meet us, followed by a tall, unsmiling blonde sister. The two Bayonne elders each took a suitcase from Elder Green and Elder Hamilton and walked away. One called back over his shoulder, "See you tomorrow," and my companion waved good-bye. I dragged my two suitcases over to her.

"Hi," I said, "I'm excited to be here." She gave a tight, little smile and led me out of the train station. Even with two heavy suitcases, I had to force myself to walk more slowly to keep her pace.

My new companion was not talkative, although I asked several times what missionary life was like. At the *bicyclette* shop I bought a bicycle and a lock, as well as some elastic straps to tie my discussion books onto the bike rack. Then we went to my first French store, where I followed my companion meekly down the aisles, pushing my cart, buying exactly what she bought.

Soup, milk, apples, lettuce, eggs, cheese. At the cheese counter I was astonished at the different sizes, shapes, and colors. "*Un demi-kilo de gruyère,*" she told the clerk. I stared at the luscious cheeses—*camembert*, *brie*, and others with unpronounceable names—but my companion had already moved on to the square cartons of milk, about the size of a box of raisins, plastic-wrapped in bundles of three and stacked with the canned goods. I was interested to see what it tasted like.

Back in our tiny kitchen, I sipped the heavy milk while looking out the balcony window. Our apartment overlooked the *l'Adour Rivière*, and across the river I could see a large cathedral and winding cobblestone roads. I was so absorbed in the view that I jumped when my companion handed me a head of lettuce.

"Wash it carefully," she said. "Bugs cling to French lettuce."

I washed it not once but twice, holding it carefully beneath the running water. After I had neatly torn several pieces, my companion gave me a carrot and a grater for the rest of the salad. She poured hot soup—made from an envelope—into our bowls. I said the prayer, my one accomplishment in French, and we ate silently.

I ate my salad first, as I always had in America, while my companion ate hers last, as do the French. As I sipped my soup, she poked the lettuce with her fork. "Ugh, a bug," she said, scraping her lettuce with her fork. "Ugh, another" and another. She found seven. Looking closely I saw several infinitesimal black spots.

"I didn't even see those," I said.

She looked at my empty salad plate and gave her first real smile. "I wonder how many were in your salad," she said.

* * *

On Friday mornings at 9:00 we met for district meeting at the *salle*, a house that doubled as the elders' apartment and as the chapel. The two

elders I had seen the day before at the *gare* lived in the bedroom upstairs. The kitchen downstairs was used for Sunday School, and Sacrament meetings were held in the living room. I greeted Elder Green like a long lost friend. Elder Hamilton smiled a cool welcome to the missionaries, as befitted his new rank.

In the chapel, my companion sat next to a deeply tanned elder and talked to him until Elder Hamilton said we were ready to start. "Where's Elder Hite?" he asked.

"He's getting ready," answered the tanned elder, then turned back to my companion.

As the meeting began, Elder Hite appeared. He hadn't shaved, and his blonde hair, uncombed, stuck out in little tufts all over his head. He carried his shoes in one hand and his tie in the other. His white shirt was open to show the top edge of his garments and an abundant amount of chest hair. I tried not to stare.

My companion continued talking with Elder Stewart under her breath as Elder Cyrano-Green and I introduced ourselves and Elder Hite put on his shoes. Elder Stewart gave the opening prayer, and then read a scripture. Our district leader read a few more scriptures, mostly about obedience and the Lord opening doors, and told us to set goals to work 60 hours a week, to tract every day, and to have companion study and prayer. We closed with a prayer to find the honest in heart and to bless the refreshments, amen. Elder Stewart had brought molars, chocolate-covered graham crackers, a French cookie popular with the missionaries. His last companion had set the mission record by eating eight boxes of molars with only a half glass of milk in twenty minutes.

After the meeting, Elder Hamilton took off at a rapid pace with Elder Cyrano-Green behind him. My companion had disappeared and I found her outside, next to her bike and tanned Elder Stewart. They were going to fix her bike, she said. "Why don't you study your discussions?" I sat on the steps where I could keep my eye on her—the little white rule book said to never leave your companion—as I studied the plastic-encased discussion I carried with me everywhere. I had told Elder Hamilton that I would be ready to pass off the first discussion on Joseph Smith and the restoration the following week, but he had only said, "You better hurry. Elder Green already passed off his first last night and he's giving me the next one tomorrow."

As I sat on the cold, concrete steps to the *salle* and studied, I could hear music playing from the upstairs apartment. But that was against

the rules, wasn't it? No music except on preparation day and then only classical. It didn't sound classical to me.

* * *

After two weeks my companion and I had not tracted once. My companion urged me to sleep as much as I needed. "You'll have jet lag for a while," she said. Although missionaries were to be up by six, she slept in until nine, letting me sleep as well. We spent most days at home reading the scriptures, although we did visit the few members in the Bayonne Branch so I could meet them.

"You seem shy," said elderly Sister Dartis, patting my arm. "You need to speak more so you can learn the language." I asked my companion if we could speak French a few hours every day for practice.

"You can if you want," she said.

We visited our few investigators. Mme Montclair's son in Paris was going to baptize her this summer. Mme Maitrepierre believed in reincarnation and health foods. I tried to comprehend these discussions, which were nothing like those I was memorizing. Our third investigator was planning a baptism when she was eighteen. She and my companion joked and talked in rapid French that was meaningless to me.

On Sundays I smiled blindly through three hours of French that bore no resemblance to the language I had learned in the MTC. In Southern France the language was strongly marked by the "Toulouse Twang"; the French said "*du pang*," not "*du pain*," and "*le fang*," not "*le fin*." On my first Sunday Sister Dartis gave me a friendly *bise* in the kitchen after Relief Society and talked with me nonstop for about ten minutes. When Elder Hite came into the kitchen for his scriptures, he caught my eye and winked. Later he asked, "Did you understand anything she said?" I shook my head.

"I didn't think so," he said. "You looked so *sincere* standing there nodding your head. But she never expects us to answer."

I came to know Elder Hite quite well, since every time my companion and I were at the elders' for church or district meetings, she left me alone so she could talk with Elder Stewart. So as I studied, I talked to Elder Hite, who was usually tieless and unshaven. He said the mission president was punishing him for not passing off his discussions. His companion had been in his MTC group. To motivate Elder Hite to learn his discussions, the president made Elder Stewart senior over Elder Hite. "I was a pretty good missionary until that happened," he said. "That really burned me, so now I don't care anymore."

He was a terrible missionary, I decided. Not only didn't he work, he listened to music, and he spent lots of money buying books, reading them instead of his scriptures. He drank Coke and left it in the kitchen where the members could see. He even went to the store without his tie.

* * *

As I began my third week in France, I decided to take things into my own hands. When Elder Hamilton asked our plans for the day after district meeting, I quickly spoke up. "We're going tracting," I said. My companion stared at me, but said nothing.

"Good," said our leader and led his companion to their bikes. Poor Elder Green, I thought. When I had asked him how he was doing, he had sighed. They worked nonstop from 9:30 in the morning until 9:30 at night. His companion wouldn't let him even bring up the subject of home, because it would distract them. They could only talk about missionary work and their investigators. Elder Green's face showed his progressive misery each time I saw him. Actually, though, I was jealous. I wished my companion were more like Elder Hamilton.

In response to my persistent gaze, my companion led me wordlessly to our *quartier*. The apartment complex she nodded her head toward was four stories high, with two apartments on each level. We started on the top floor. She took the first door, I took the second, she took the next and so on. Except for our brief speech at each door, we were silent: "*Bonjour, nous sommes missionnaires de l'Eglise de Jésus Christ des Saints des Derniers Jours.*" The French responses were meaningless to me, so I turned to my companion, who looked at me blankly until the door closed and led me to the next door. After two buildings of silence, I finally asked why she didn't help me talk to the people.

"It wasn't my idea to go tracting," she said.

"But we're missionaries," I said. "Missionaries tract."

"I was going to go home and read my scriptures," she said sternly.

According to the little white handbook, juniors had to follow their seniors, but it didn't say what to do about companions who didn't speak or work. "I'm sorry," I said at last.

I followed her to our bikes and rode as far behind her as I could without losing sight of her. She pedaled sedately ahead. At home she sat on her bed and opened her Book of Mormon. I sat on my bed and opened my Book of Mormon.

* * *

I didn't suggest tracting again. In our apartment during the day, I memorized the scriptures that new missionaries had to pass off. At the *salle*, I sat on the stone steps and studied with my fingers in my ears to block out Elder Hite's music, while my companion talked to Elder Stewart.

One day my companion told me I was to give a talk in sacrament meeting the next week. When I protested that I had only been in France three weeks, she shrugged and said, "I spoke last month." At the look on my face, she compromised. "Write a talk in English and I'll translate it into French," she said. That Sunday as I spoke to the fifteen-member congregation, I scarcely glanced at my companion's handwritten notes. The words seemed to come from somewhere other than the shaking paper I held in my hands, words that made no sense to me even as they flowed from my mouth. Was I making a complete idiot of myself, I wondered and interrupted myself to ask the faces that stared at me in amazement, "*Est-ce que vous pouvez me comprendre?*"

"*Oui, oui, continuez. Ça vas très bien,*" they reassured me enthusiastically. After the meeting they lined up to shake my hands, everyone marveling that such a new missionary spoke such fluent French. Even my companion smiled and told me I sounded almost like a native. The next day she surprised me with a visit to a *boulangerie*, where we celebrated with flaky, cream-filled *mille-feuilles* and *pain au chocolat*. The chocolate-filled *croissants* were still warm from the oven, and we ate them silently together.

That night she asked if I could give her a permanent; she was tired of her long, straight hair. As I rolled her hair, she gradually warmed. She felt guilty for talking to Elder Stewart all the time, she confessed. She was afraid he wouldn't like her after they both went home. And she was ready to go home, she said. After a year, she was exhausted and discouraged. She hadn't baptized anyone, she wasn't getting any younger, she didn't know what she'd do after her mission anyway.

"I'll be going this next transfer," she said. "You'll get a better companion and can do things differently." I was torn between relief and fear, fear of having another uncommunicative companion, relief that this month of silence was going to end.

* * *

Despite my fears, most of the companions who followed were as communicative as my first companion had been withdrawn. As we tracted we ate Lindor chocolate, and in between doors we talked about our lives before we became missionaries and the lives we would return to. In the summer we taught German and English tourists in the park, using the *panneaux*, our bright yellow, four-sided sign with pictures of temples on one side, Jesus on another, families on a third side, and the story of the Book of Mormon on the fourth side.

Now, after nine months in France, I spoke French more easily. I liked the green freshness of southern France and the cold elegance of the many cathedrals. I liked the long, skinny loaves of French bread, the smooth, rich chocolate, and the wide variety of cheeses. I liked eating a lunch of bananas and yogurt as my companion and I sat on the hill that overlooked the beach, which was empty and desolate after September. And I liked the quiet evenings when we rode our bicycles side by side down the narrow roads, pedaling lazily in the cool, silvery dusk.

But at night I dreamed in incomprehensible French and heard slammed doors and angry voices. *How do you explain a God who lets my wife suffer with cancer? Religion is a crutch. We don't need religion.*

I heard my own words at my mission farewell before I entered the MTC: *My only desire is to serve the Lord. I want to be the best missionary I can be so I can bring people into the only true Church on the face of the earth.*

I still heard the words of my first companion: *We'll only be together a month, so why even bother getting to know each other?* My second companion, more cheerful and talkative: *We need to lose ourselves in the work. Just be happy and don't think about yourself.* My third companion, cool and aloof: *Don't take it personally, but I just don't like you.*

But the most insistent voices of all came from my mission leaders when I was awake: *Be obedient and the Lord will bless you. You are as successful in life as you are on your mission. Your mission is a life in miniature. You will be held accountable for all the people you could have taught if you had taken your responsibilities seriously.*

I spent seven months in Bayonne and a brief month in Beziers. Then I was transferred to Perpignon, another small town near the border of Spain, to be with Sister Little, an ironically petite, soft-spoken convert from England. We left at 9:30 in the morning and worked until 9:30 in the evening. After only one month she was transferred and I was made senior.

I thought of my first senior companion as I waited at the *gare* for my new companion. She was home in Canada now and I wondered if she

was happy. I sat alone on the bench as the elders stood on the other side of the *gare*. Warned to avoid temptation, they avoided the sister missionaries, speaking to us only when necessary. They usually tracted 60 to 70 hours a week, teaching perhaps only once or twice. Most saw no more than two baptisms their entire missions; many averaged fewer. They may have just been too tired to talk to the sisters although Elder Black and Elder Jackson took time to announce their yogurt-eating contest. They were going to eat 50 liters of yogurt each in one week.

The train rustled and whistled into the station. When it stopped, the doors slid open and a smiling French-braided brunette looked out the door and waved energetically. I smiled hello and led her to our bikes where we strapped her suitcases on to the back. "Toulouse was so great," she said over and over as she described the people she had taught there during her first month. "I know they'll be baptized soon." As we pedaled toward our apartment, I could hear her singing behind me and recognized the children's French song from the movie *South Pacific*:

Dites-moi pourquoi la vie est belle. Dites-moi pourquoi la vie est gaie . . .

"Why is life beautiful . . . why is life gay?" she warbled behind me as we rode home, where we unpacked her suitcases. We shopped quickly at *Mammouth*, the enormous store where missionaries could buy food, clothes, souvenirs, postcards, and other necessities. My new companion talked continuously as we shopped, telling me of her conversion in Quebec a year ago, of her decision to be a missionary, and her desire to do the Lord's work and baptize. Back in our apartment I gathered my laundry as she unpacked and talked. Laundromats were usually too far away to use and too expensive, even for once a week. I excused myself to do my wash and closed the door behind me.

I scrubbed my garments furiously together between my hands, until my fingers were sore and blanched white, my nails clean and soft.

* * *

At district meeting the next day, I saw the familiar faces of Elder Hamilton, my new zone leader, and Elder Hite, who had just arrived in Perpignon. He'd spent the last few months in Toulouse so the mission president could keep an eye on him. In Bayonne he had convinced a young member to let him ride his *mobilette*, then forgot that French motorcycles are built differently than American ones—the brake is on

the left, not the right. He braked too suddenly and flipped off, injuring his shoulder. Now he and his new companion entered the *salle* after we had already finished singing *Rédempteur d'Israël*. He didn't seem much changed; although he wore a tie, he obviously hadn't combed his hair.

Elder Hamilton directed our meeting briskly, and when the other missionaries asked him what he was going to do when he went home next month, he refused to answer. His life was his mission, he said, and he would consecrate his complete energy to the work until his last day. After our district meeting he pulled me aside to ask if I thought Elder Green had gone home early, after only three months, because of him.

I said only that Elder Green had been very homesick.

"I shouldn't have pushed him so hard," he said. I didn't disagree.

As I waited for Sister Duriet to talk to the other zone leader, Elder Hite stopped by my chair. "How ya doing?" he asked. "Fine," I told him.

"Sure," he grinned wryly. "Tell me about it. You and your companions were famous. Your name was in the mission newsletter for about four months in a row with all those baptisms in Bayonne."

When I didn't say anything he continued to wait. I thought of the baptisms of Christine and Dominique, both young college students, in a shining river one bright day in June, as several fisherman upstream looked at us curiously. Marielle, another student, and Mme Rigale, an older woman we had found while tracting, preferred baptism in the ocean. Nobody thought to tell Marielle to wear white underwear. Beneath the wet, white polyester dress that clung to her body, her black bikini was clearly outlined.

Mme Rigale hadn't really been ready, but the elders wanted her baptized anyway. She had gone home immediately after her baptism, not even waiting to be confirmed to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost or to hear the talk on baptism that Christine, the newest member, had especially prepared. Our district and zone leaders just asked when our next baptism would be.

When I called the mission president to talk to him, he said, "I'll be in Pau for conference next week. Can it wait until then?"

In Pau I was shaking from hunger and fear as I waited for the president to call me aside to talk to me. I had fasted so I would be ready to talk to him, rehearsed conversations in my head. When I saw his wife, I asked when he would be seeing me.

"He didn't say anything to me," she said. "He's in meetings until two, then we're leaving right away for Bordeaux."

At the look on my face, she asked in concern, "Is anything wrong?" and motioned me toward a bench in the corner of the room where we could talk. As I stumbled over my words, an elder passed by and she called out to him, "How are you doing in Tarbes? We miss you in the office." I waited until they finished speaking, and she turned back to me. She interrupted me a second time when another elder passed, then another. Finally, I excused myself and she barely nodded when I left.

It was nearly two o'clock before my mission president signaled me. Pulling me into an empty room, he said quickly, "Make it fast," and looked out the window. Only a few minutes to describe feelings and questions that had taken months to build up. Only a few minutes to tell him how much I needed to talk to someone who could answer those questions and soothe those feelings. I couldn't tell him that now.

"It's nothing," I said finally. "I'm fine now."

"The trees are so beautiful with their different colors," he said, still not looking at me. "And even in November there's a rose still blooming under the tree." We gazed at the tree together and I took a deep breath ready to try again. But he had already opened the door and was waiting for me to leave.

* * *

But that had been two months before. Now Elder Hite was still waiting for me to speak. My companion was calling my name and pulling on her coat. "See you later," I said as I stood up.

"Hang in there," he said.

Back in our apartment, after a lunch of eggplant *ratatouille*, I told my new companion we had three rendezvous that afternoon with new investigators—Mme LeFont at two, Sylvie at four, and the Conesa family at six. A native French speaker, she spoke easily with all of them, bore her testimony fervently, and made the follow-up appointments, which she apologized for after we left.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I was just so excited. Since you're the senior, I'll try to follow your lead. But don't you think we should have both an opening and a closing prayer when we teach?" We had skipped the opening prayer with the Conesa family because, from the moment of our arrival, Mr. Conesa had barraged me with questions about death, because he and his wife had just come from a funeral. Since the conversation had flowed naturally from their questions to the plan of salvation, I had motioned to my companion that we would postpone the discussion we had planned.

After shaking hands and kissing cheeks, we left the Conesas and returned to our apartment. My companion looked at me in surprise as I took off my coat and sat down at the table. "It's only eight," she said.

"People aren't very responsive this time of night when you try to tract," I said. "Besides, sisters have been told not to go out when it's dark unless they have specific rendezvous. There have been problems. We tracted three hours this morning and taught three rendezvous. I think that's enough." I didn't tell her that a man had grabbed me the month before as I was following my companion on foot down a narrow street. He had quickly run off and my companion had brought me home immediately and put me in bed with hot chocolate.

Now Sister Duriet stood at the door in her coat, not putting down her scriptures. "There's someone out there waiting for us," she insisted. We stared at each other and after several minutes I stood up. Although it was nearly nine before we chained our bikes and walked to the first *bâtiment*, she was undaunted. We started on the top floor, as usual, and the people at the first three doors told us to leave them alone at night. Then, to my surprise, a short, balding Italian man and his smiling wife let us in. We told them about Joseph Smith and the golden plates. They were interested, but not convinced. "*Non, non,*" they said, when we asked if we could come back and teach them, "*Nous sommes catholiques.*"

It was after ten when we got home, and Sister Duriet was silent as we undressed for bed. "What is it?" I asked her.

"If we hadn't wasted so much time coming home after teaching the Conesas, we could have tracted more and finished on time," she said changing into her nightgown. "I'm not going to keep dragging you out all the time. You need to do your part."

Without answering, I went into the bathroom and closed the door. I didn't come out until I knew she would be asleep.

She awoke at six and hummed as she braided her hair. We read our scriptures together for an hour, then individually for an hour. Before leaving the apartment at 9:30, we had our required companion prayer then rode our bicycles to our tracting area.

That day and on the days that followed, she rode her bicycle cheerfully across town, singing gaily behind me. She was cheerful and affectionate to our investigators and to the branch members. When we taught, she bore her testimony frequently, tears filling her eyes. She loved her mission, she told everybody who would listen, and she denied any homesickness or desire to return home after her mission. She was going to stay here all her life, she vowed. She loved being a missionary.

When we tracted out Jean Michel, I asked Elder Hite and his companion to come with us for our second discussion. Jean Michel was young and single and sister missionaries couldn't teach single male contacts just as elders couldn't teach young girls. My companion wanted to ask a more serious-minded missionary to come with us, but Elder Hite and his companion lived nearest to Jean Michel.

Elder Hite and Jean Michel talked easily from the beginning, while his companion attempted to steer the conversation toward the plan of salvation. Elder Hite's incessant double-playing on words kept us all laughing, but I noticed that when he taught his eyes were serious.

Although I hadn't been especially kind to him in Bayonne, Elder Hite always asked how I was doing. He wore a tie and combed his hair most of the time these days, but he was still late to district meetings, especially now that he lived several kilometers from the *salle*. On Sundays and at district meetings we always talked together; he was the only one who ever asked how I was doing, so I told him while my companion sat stony-faced on the steps of the *salle* studying her discussions.

One day as we taught Mme Font, I started to cry and had to leave the room. As we left my companion looked at me softly and put her arm around me. She thought I had been moved by the Spirit and didn't understand when I pulled away and refused to talk about it. My companion and I spoke only when we made our plans for the day. We discussed our meetings with members and investigators, which *quartier* we would tract in—we had two areas on opposite ends of town—and which callbacks looked promising. Once a week we sat down at our table and shared a lifeless companionship inventory to decide what discussions to teach our investigators. I heard her crying in her bed at night, but I didn't talk to her.

We both cried when Veronique was baptized, although not for the same reason. Veronique had been introduced to the Church at a young adult conference and had been deeply moved by the spirit she felt there. After our second discussion she asked to be baptized. She had been coming to church for nearly a month and the entire ward knew and loved her; nearly 50 people attended her baptism. Everyone thought it entirely normal that the sister missionaries would cry at this special occasion.

One evening, after a fireside at the *salle*, one of the young female members approached me giggling. "*Dites à Frère Hite que sa braguette n'est pas fermée,*" she whispered. None of the elders had noticed Elder Hite's unzipped trousers, although several young female members had. I remembered my embarrassment when I spoke at Dominique's

baptism with my blouse unbuttoned several inches too low, as an elder pointed out to me afterward. A sister missionary can certainly tell an elder to zip his zipper, I decided, and sidled up to Elder Hite at the refreshment table. "Your zipper's down, Elder Hite," I whispered.

His face without expression, he bit into the round, flat *gateaux* in his hand, chewed slowly, and swallowed. "I know. I did it on purpose."

I choked and coughed, and when I could breathe I laughed. Smiling crookedly he said, "That's better. You looked like you were carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders."

I coughed some more and thanked him for his thoughtfulness.

The next week after district meeting as I stood talking with Elder Hite, my companion said curtly, "I'm going to talk to our zone leaders." She walked across the street to a bus stop where they sat together on the bench. As she wiped her eyes and pointed to me, both elders looked at me with an odd expression.

"Doesn't look good," said Elder Hite. He touched my arm quickly then left with his companion who stood waiting at the bottom of the stairs.

Standing on the steps of the quiet *salle*, I watched my companion and the zone leaders talk. At last Elder Hamilton rose and came toward me, leaving our companions alone on the bench. I waited for him to speak.

"Do you know how unhappy you're making your companion?" he asked. "Did you know she cries herself to sleep at night?"

"Yes," I answered.

"She says you never talk to her or share your feelings, and she's exhausted from dragging you everywhere."

"I'm ready to go at 9:30 in the morning and we usually have rendezvous till 9:30 at night," I said, "except for one morning when I was sick." I didn't add that when I told her we weren't going out she had grabbed her Book of Mormon and walked outside, slamming the door behind her. She sat on the front porch reading for over two hours and didn't speak to me when she came back in. She didn't ask if I was feeling better, and I didn't tell her.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I just can't talk with her. She doesn't understand what I'm feeling. I don't understand what I'm feeling."

Elder Hamilton was silent, and then he walked away. I waited for my companion, who didn't meet my eyes as we walked wordlessly to our bikes. I pedaled slowly to our tracting area, her bike trailing in the distance behind me.

Hurricane—Mid-Atlantic

The ocean liner tried to skirt
the storm, but the clouds clung,
waves mounting, the craft trembling
through multi-story swells and troughs.

Passengers clung to their bunks
through retching hours, obedient
to the violence of motion.
The stoic played solitaire.

A brave few staggered through
rolling passageways to talk in low,
raspy voices about the captain's
impotence and natal origins.

The dance floor was roped off
like a boxing ring. Drunk and giddy,
some danced, thrown giggling against
each other and into the ropes.

Most were buried in their staterooms,
meals forgotten, sheets pulled like
cows over their heads and wrapped
loosely about their shrouded limbs.

For three days of dark madness,
wind tried to force passage within,
and horizontal rain filled
the cleavage of sky and sea,

until finally, slipping from under
the terrible passion of storm,
the ship fled into calmer waters
and the dead began to awaken.

—Sally Taylor

Germany (1947-48): The Maturing of an Imagination

by

Douglas Thayer

In February, after two months of temporary duty at Camp Kilmer, I shipped out for Germany. The night before I left, I phoned my mother, who told me to be sure and go to church when I got there. I was glad I was going to Germany. I had always wanted to fight with General Patton against General Rommel. But we did not carry our rifles aboard the *MIT Victory*. In the war movies, newsreels, *Life*, and the newspaper pictures, the troops had always carried their duffel bags and their rifles on board. The war in Europe had been over for nearly two years.

I was very seasick. But as I clung to the rail hour after hour during the six days it took to cross the Atlantic, ready at any moment to vomit again, I longed to see a U-boat periscope. We did not travel in convoy. I heard no sirens, saw no exploding, burning, dying ships. No destroyers raced past us to attack the lurking U-boats with depth charges. Still full of a boy's romantic love of war, I watched the sea in vain. Lying in my bunk in the darkness, planning my return home after my discharge was my only comfort. I was still homesick, but it wasn't as bad as it had been in basic.

The *MIT Victory* arrived on a late, dark evening in Bremerhaven. I crowded with other GIs along the rails to see Germany, but everything was dark, covered with grey snow. We did not speak. Nothing moved; none of the harbor buildings was lit inside. Snow fell. I was amazed Germany actually existed.

The next morning Germany was still grey, but the snow had stopped. The smell of Germany was cold, moist, and heavy. Going down the gangplank, we did not speak to each other. The buildings were different; I had never seen cobblestones before. I could not yet understand I was in Germany. All through the War, I had heard about

Germany. I would not have been surprised to see the flashes of cannons against the horizon, seen tanks battling in the streets, or looked up to see burning fighters and bombers falling out of the sky.

We boarded the small, unheated train for the trip to Marburg for assignment. Every compartment had an outside door. None of the cars were heated. We wore our overcoats, gloves, and hats against the cold. After the first hour or two, I was the only one who kept reaching up his gloved hand to rub frost from the window so I could look out at Germany. The other GIs in the compartment sat smoking, huddled, quietly cursing the cold.

Many of the towns and cities were almost totally destroyed, square miles of mounded snow-covered rubble. No civilian vehicles moved on the roads, no children played in the streets, and no smoke rose from the chimneys of the undestroyed houses. The few civilians, mostly old women and old men dressed in black, moved slowly on the sides of the roads, as if very tired. The Germans were starving and freezing.

All day I watched. I read the names of all the German towns we went through, tried to pronounce them in my mind. I wondered where the German Mormons lived. I watched for deer, wild pigs, pheasants, and rabbits. I had heard the hunting was good in Germany. I'd never hunted wild pigs. I looked for the hunting preserves Special Services had requisitioned for GIs. I expected there to be signs and flags over the entrances.

At the sides of the tracks lay the destroyed, snow-covered railroad locomotives and cars; I watched for destroyed trucks, artillery, and tanks along the roads. In the ice-lined rivers the bridges lay collapsed. The dark German forests came down to the edges of the fields, and on the high hills stood the medieval castles, the battle towers silhouetted black against the grey sky. Germany seemed old.

Sitting in the compartment, I saw everything through glass. I was an observer. Although I could not comprehend what I saw, I knew that I did not live in this place. I lived five thousand miles away in a valley of the Rocky Mountains, where nothing was destroyed. I could not connect all of this destruction to myself in any way. I no longer wished I had fought in the battles. I was too cold. Yet I was incredibly curious, excited. Germany was different. Nothing in my life had ever been as different as Germany. Already I felt a little changed, but I didn't know why.

In the railroad stations where the train stopped, bands of German boys pressed their ungloved red hands against the windows and

begged for cigarettes, candy, and gum. Their shouts came muted through the cold glass, the English words heavy with a German accent. "Soldier, you give me chocolate, please." I searched through my pockets, but I had nothing to give them. I wanted to give them food. I had never before seen children beg for food. It made me feel different, but I didn't know why. I wanted to be able to speak German so I could ask them what it felt like to be German.

If German women stood anywhere on the station platform, the GIs in my compartment dropped the door window down on the long, heavy leather strap and called out, "*Fräulein! Hey, Fräulein!*" The German women, always dressed in black and wearing black hats, stared at the GIs, but they did not smile or speak. "*Hey, Fräulein, sprechen English?*" I looked at the floor. I was embarrassed. Sometimes the GIs shouted obscene invitations in English.

Waiting in Marburg for my assignment, I worked in the railroad yards for two days loading trucks with coal briquettes and delivering them to the houses of the army officers. The German women on the sidewalks turned to watch as we passed. I felt guilty. I didn't know why the German families couldn't be warm too. Sitting on top of the load, I pushed briquettes off onto the snow-covered street with my feet as we passed. The women hurried out to put the briquettes in their black bags, and then raised their hands to wave slowly. I waved back. Everything seemed different in Germany. I didn't know how to think about it.

I and several other GIs were assigned to the 7702 Headquarters and Service Battalion in Frankfurt. The 7702 staffed the offices for the headquarters of the European Command. Our train from Marburg arrived at night. It was snowing. Snow fell through the huge holes in the domed ceiling of the Frankfurt *Bahnhof*. A truck carried us through the dark, ruined city to Able Area. A high, barbed-wire fence with a light every fifty feet circled the compound. At the guarded gate, groups of German women stood waiting in the falling snow. I wondered what they wanted.

Less than two years before, German soldiers had lived in the three-story, yellow, stucco barracks. I shared a three-man room with Sergeant Castle and Corporal Patrecelli on the top floor of the last building on the heating line. There was almost no heat. I stood at the window looking down. Under the lights, perhaps thirty German women walked outside the fence, black silhouettes in the falling snow.

The women stopped to raise their hands and beckon to the GIs standing at the lighted windows in the next barracks down. Several of

the GIs opened their windows to throw things to the women; one GI waved, and the light in his window went out. The women fought for what fell into the snow. A GI came up to the women and walked away with one, his arm around her waist.

I turned to Patrecelli, who stood by me looking down, and asked him what the women were doing.

"They're *Fräuleins*, kid," he said, as if that was the only explanation necessary.

The women came every evening to offer themselves in exchange for PX soap, chocolate, and cigarettes to trade on the black market for food and fuel. Patrecelli held up a package of cigarettes and told me it was better than money. He asked me how old I was. He envied me my youth. He told me I was in the promised land, but that Germany wasn't as good as it had been six months before.

I said nothing. I watched the women. I couldn't believe that so many women could be immoral. I watched them for a long time. I counted the women. I couldn't believe it. I emptied my duffel bag and put my things into the empty wooden German wall locker, but I kept walking over to the window to look down through the falling snow at the women.

In Provo, I had never known a woman who was immoral. Something seemed terribly wrong, but I didn't quite know what it was. I knew, though, I would not write my mother to tell her about the women outside the fence.

I slept cold that night under four GI blankets and my overcoat. Awake, I lay thinking about the German women outside. I wondered if they were still there, but I didn't get up to look. It was too cold. I thought about the German soldiers who had lived in my room. I had looked for German names written on the inside of the door to my wooden locker, but I found none. I wondered how many of these men had been killed and what the German dog tags were like.

The next morning when I showered, the water was cold. Used pro-kits lay in the long porcelain sink when I shaved and brushed my teeth. Some mornings there was vomit in the sinks and on the stairs. I'd shaved for six months, but I still could feel my beard only just below my sideburns.

I worked as a clerk-typist in the Criminal Investigation Division, Provost Marshal's Office, European Command, with thirty other GIs. In the file room, which Sergeant Castle ran, we had records of all of the felonies committed by American military personnel since the first GIs had arrived in England.

Rape, robbery, assault, arson, murder, sodomy, suicide, embezzlement, kidnapping—all the crimes possible to man were recorded there. Confessions, statements from witnesses and surviving victims, reports of investigating officers, coroners' reports, diagrams, and large glossy black and white photographs filled the files. The clerks all read the most lurid files at lunch time or, if they had a few minutes, during the day. I began to read the files. My enlistment still moved slowly, but my life was more interesting now.

Sylvia Hahn, a civilian employee who had been a WAC during the War, ran our office. When I said I was from Utah, she asked me if I was Mormon. When I said yes, she said all the Mormons she had known in the army were fine people. She said I would get promoted if I worked hard. I told her I knew how to work hard. I made private first class two months later. Every new rank paid more money. I wanted the money for the down payment on a house for my mother, for furloughs, and to buy things in the PX. The PX had beautiful things made in Germany.

Every morning the first week, when I marched to work with the two thousand other GIs to the I. G. Farben and other buildings, I expected our column to be attacked by German partisans or shot at by snipers hidden in the half-ruined buildings, but that didn't happen. When we returned to Able Area from work in the early evening, the German women stood crowded in front of the gate. The younger women waited for their GI boyfriends; the older women came to deliver or pick up laundry.

Immediately after supper in the mess hall, the GIs streamed out the front gate to their waiting girlfriends. Every GI carried a bag of some kind for his cigarettes, cookies, candy, nylons, coffee, soap, and uneaten bread, meat, and fresh fruit from his supper tray. These were for his German *Shatzie* or her family or to trade for food, liquor, or fuel, or to pay the rent on the room. The bag was called a shack bag. On payday GIs filled their duffel bags with the unrationed items.

I stood in front of the mess hall in the cold to watch the crowd of men going out the gate to the women. I wanted the commanding officer, the MPs, or the chaplain to stop them, but that never happened. After the first week I no longer stood to watch the GIs leaving. I knew that some of these same women had waited in the evening for German soldiers to come through the gate.

And after a month or two it did not startle me to see the women waiting at the gate, and I threw candy and soap to the women walking along the fence, but I did not throw cigarettes. The women waved and

I waved back. I wanted them to have the things they needed and to be happy, and not have to walk outside the fence at night to get things for themselves and their families. I wanted them to marry their American boyfriends and go to America and be happy. Sergeant Castle had a car, and I gave most of my weekly cigarette ration to him to keep it repaired. He took me places in his car.

GIs got VD. At the 97th General Hospital, men on the VD ward wore red robes with "VD" written in large white letters on the back. In the barracks the duty sergeant woke us up at three in the morning sometimes to stand by our bunks in our shorts for VD check. I did not really believe what the doctors told us in their regular VD lectures about the only way to be infected. They always told the same joke about taking your girlfriend into the latrine if that's where you got VD, and the GIs always laughed. But the doctors did not use obscene words when they talked to us.

In basic I saw the VD films. However, nobody got VD because we weren't allowed off base. But men in the section got VD now, went to the hospital or bought penicillin on the black market, and they didn't stop being immoral. Nobody thought they were different. I had always believed having a venereal disease was one of the worst things that could happen to you, and you would never forgive yourself and it would change your whole life and the lives of the people who loved you. But I saw that it didn't. It was possible for a GI to be immoral every night and get VD and still be happy, which surprised me.

I went to the gate every week to give my dirty laundry to one of the older German women and pick up my clean laundry. Because I wanted to be an example of a good American soldier, I was always very careful to be at the gate when I told her I would, and I paid her two bars of soap rather than the one she asked for. She told me in her few words of English that I was not like the other *amerikanische Soldaten*, which made me feel good. She invited me to her home to meet her husband, and I went; but he did not speak English, and I knew only a few German words and no grammar.

Like all of the other GIs, I had begun to use certain German words. We used them to talk to German women, for there seemed to be no German men to talk to. We also used them to talk to each other, for the German words seemed better than the English words for some things; and they helped make commerce, travel, and pleasure possible: *kaput*, *Strasse*, *Leica*, *Frau*, *Geld*, *Russland*, *Cigaretten*, *Schokolade*, *Amerikaner*, *Kreig*, *prima*, *danke*, *nein*, and *ja*. I liked the German words. I wanted to

speak German well, but I didn't study it. There was little time or opportunity.

The first month I was in Frankfurt, I found a small Mormon group that met in a military chapel. The group leader was a first lieutenant who had graduated from West Point. His wife played the piano. Sometimes only the three of us met, but we had the sacrament and bore our testimonies. We encouraged each other to keep the commandments and not leave the Church. We talked about how easy that would be in Germany in the army. Sometimes we attended the German Frankfurt branch of the Church, where the German members shook my hand and called me *Bruder*.

My mother reminded me in her letters to go to church. I wrote and told her I had learned how to drive a jeep. Because my mother didn't have a car, I'd never learned how to drive. At B.Y. High only two of my friends, George Collard and Dan Larsen, had owned cars.

I told my mother about the Frankfurt PX and Barter Market and that I would send her home some beautiful German things. At the Barter Market you got points for the boxes of soap, coffee, candy, cigarettes, and canned meat you had somebody send you from home, and the Germans got points for their valuable possessions. I didn't have anything to trade for points, but I went with Sergeant Castle. I liked to look at the things you could get and how many points they cost.

I began that first winter to go to the monthly section parties. Sergeant Castle, although he was twelve years older than I was, became my friend. He urged me to go. He said I would like the parties and had to learn to have more fun. He never called me by my first name. His girlfriend was named Zita, and they were engaged to be married. I went places with them in Castle's car.

The GIs in the Provost Marshal's section held a party every month and brought their German girlfriends. WACs and American women civilian employees did not come to these parties. We held the parties in a German *Gasthaus*, and we all chipped in packages of cigarettes to rent the place, pay for the three- or four-piece German band, the liquor, food, and coal briquettes, and to tip the waiters.

In Provo I didn't know such parties existed, but I liked these parties. I had begun to enjoy myself more. I began to see that I could do what I wanted. I didn't lie in my bunk every night now, planning the details of my discharge and return to Provo. In the mornings when I shaved, with my hand I could feel my beard if I pressed hard.

At the parties I liked to sit and watch people and listen to the stories the German women told about the War as they sat incessantly smoking,

drinking, and eating. I drank only Cokes. Some members of the Church said that because of the caffeine, Coke was as bad as coffee and so against the Word of Wisdom, but that didn't seem very important to me.

I was the only GI without a *Fräulein*. I had never sat before for hours watching people and talking mostly to women. I liked to be near them. The GIs never used obscene words at the tables. Sometimes their girlfriends asked to hold their dog tags.

The girlfriends told how their homes, villages, and cities had been destroyed in the bombing raids and battles, their boyfriends, brothers, and fathers killed in *Russland*, and how children and old people had starved or frozen. The girlfriends told of rape, pillage, of fleeing before the Russians, leaving their beautiful towns and villages in the East Zone. And although they did not accuse the American air force, they described the great fire raids on Hamburg, Dresden, and Berlin that destroyed vast areas of the cities and tens of thousands of people in a racing wall of fire and superheated air. Each *Fräulein* always said the Americans were wonderful.

I believed all of the stories. The Frankfurt ruins and all the destruction I had seen from the train coming down from Bremerhaven proved the stories. In Provo, men had gone to war, and most of them had returned, and people died of disease and accident; but these stories of years of loss, suffering, despair, and death described a world I didn't know. It made me feel older and not so safe, and I began to understand how quickly chaos could come.

The *Fräuleins* did not speak of the concentration camps, the Nazis, the SS, or Hitler, or anything that Germany had done wrong in the War. Their own suffering had been too great. They could talk only of what had happened to them and their families. And when they talked of all the lost German men, the hundreds of thousands still prisoners of war in *Russland*, we told them we were sorry. We did not accuse Germany of anything. It didn't seem important. The stories the girlfriends told were all personal.

"Now Germany is *kaput*, yes?" one *Fräulein* said, pouring beer into a tall glass, a cigarette in the hand holding the bottle. I smiled. I didn't know what to say. She said the American army should have joined the German army to fight the Russians, and then everything would have been much better. "You will see," she said.

I always sat at a table with Sergeant Castle, Zita, and Patrecelli and his girlfriend. We played cards—hearts—and talked. A lot of people in

the Church thought it was wrong to play with face cards, but I liked to play hearts. I didn't think I had to be an example for the Church all the time. It surprised me how much I liked to sit at the table talking, playing hearts, and drinking Coke. Always during the evening some of the German girls at the other tables would come and ask me to dance. The boyfriends had told them I was very religious and that I didn't drink, smoke, or have a girlfriend.

On the dance floor, talking above the loud German music, the German girlfriends told me how nice it was to meet a nice American boy like me, which pleased me very much. They wanted to know all about me. It was hard for them to pronounce the "th" in my last name. When I told them I was saving my money to help buy my mother a house, they said all Americans were rich.

I held the German women out away from me when we danced.

Some of the German women did not have enough soap and hot water to bathe often or wash their clothes, and they had a faint sour smell. But after a while it seemed natural, like the way they kept smoking, eating, and drinking.

In my letters home I didn't tell my mother about the parties. I began to understand that if I wanted to be responsible for myself, I couldn't tell my mother about everything I did.

The winter was very cold, with a lot of snow. In the mess hall two special, clean GI cans were set out for any scraps of edible food left on our trays. Some GIs took a second portion, which they never touched, and put this in the cans. Two nuns came from an orphanage near Able Area to take the cans on their sled. One evening a can tipped off the sled, and I and another GI knelt in the wind to help the nuns gather the pieces of bread, meat, and potatoes from the packed snow.

"Danke," they said. "Danke."

"Bitte," I said.

I stood watching the nuns pull their loaded sled toward the gate, the wind blowing their long black capes. The women outside the gate parted to let them pass.

On Saturdays when I rode the *Strassenbahn* to downtown Frankfurt to go to the Barter Market or servicemen's club, I sometimes got off and walked to the edge of the rubble. Two floors up in the standing walls, pieces of curtains sometimes hung at glassless windows, and doors swung open onto air. Dead weeds, small leafless trees, and crosses made of shot pieces of water pipe wired together stuck up out of the snow. On bulletin boards were messages written by those

searching for mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, and children. I tried to read these, but I could read only names, which I spoke aloud.

I knew that bodies still lay buried in the rubble, and unexploded bombs. I looked at the crosses and the names on the cards. I did not try to imagine the bombing raids. I thought just about the people, who they were, those who had written the notes, and those who would never read them. I felt sorry. I knew that Provo had never been bombed.

In the German branch, the members sang the same hymns we sang in the Sixth Ward and used the same sacrament prayers, read the same Book of Mormon, except the words were German. When the German members asked me in broken English if I would be a missionary for the Church, I said *ja*. They said perhaps I would come back to Germany as a missionary after my discharge, and I said *ja*.

I did not hike across the Frankfurt rubble. I had heard rumors of youth gangs that lived in a complex of underground cellars, who came out to rob and pillage at night. It was said that sometimes, out of vengeance for the War, they attacked GIs who ventured too close to the rubble alone or with a *Fräulein*.

I went to the movies nearly every Saturday with Sergeant Castle. But the new war movies we saw didn't thrill me very much any more. They were harder to believe.

In March it began to rain a lot, but it was warmer. In April I turned eighteen and at the section party everybody toasted me and sang happy birthday. In May the sky was blue quite often and the smells were better, except close to the rubble. The smell of rubble was sweet and heavy. I'd read that was how decaying bodies smelled.

I took an evening class in American history so I could get into college when I returned home and wouldn't have to finish my senior year of high school. I thought about studying German, but I didn't have time to study that hard. In the evenings I went to the servicemen's club with Castle and Zita to watch the variety shows Special Services put on with German entertainers. And on Saturdays I played tennis and golf and went horseback riding. I had never done these things before. I took piano and singing lessons from *Fräulein* Zoll, who was brought by Special Services every week to Able Area. She lived with her mother in a partially destroyed villa outside of Frankfurt on the Heddenheimer Landstrasse. I gave *Fräulein* Zoll a package of cigarettes for every lesson, and I gave her extra cigarettes to trade for flour, butter, and eggs so we could have cake with our *maltz kaffee* when I visited her and her mother.

When I left the barracks on Saturday or Sunday to visit *Fräulein* Zoll, some of the other GIs said that old Thayer had finally found a *Fräulein* he wasn't telling anybody about. When they laughed and asked me how I liked it, I told them repeatedly that *Fräulein* Zoll was nearly as old as my mother and was my music teacher. But they just laughed harder. They wanted to know what I had in my shack bag and what a lesson cost. They said it must be awfully nice music I was learning.

Finally I stopped trying to convince them. It didn't seem so important that everybody knew I wasn't immoral. I knew I wasn't. If a GI said he was engaged to his German girlfriend, who was a nice person, and they weren't immoral, the other GIs always laughed and said, "Sure." Zita was a nice person.

The summer was warm and there were more Germans out walking, and sometimes old German cars and trucks drove down the streets. In the vacant lots the Germans worked in their vegetable gardens taking care of their potatoes. More little stores were open, and construction scaffolds clung against some damaged buildings. But I could not believe the Germans would ever rebuild Germany. It seemed impossible. I was glad that in a year I would be home, where the houses and buildings were not destroyed and everything was safe. For me Germany was only temporary.

At the section parties the German girlfriends did not seem so hungry or so desperate as they had been in the cold winter. And GIs on my floor in the barracks complained that things were getting worse. Every month or so GIs returned to the States, and it pleased me that I had less time to serve in my enlistment than the replacements. Sylvia Hahn liked my work, and I made corporal. In her letters my mother said she was proud of me. She said the army was good for me, and I would soon be home with my family and all those who loved me. Jim Rhodes, George Col-lard, and some of my other friends who had graduated from B.Y. High that spring were joining the army. To me they seemed very young.

In July I went on furlough with a GI named Simmons to Garmish, site of the 1936 Olympic Games, and we stayed in a large hotel on the shores of a lake called Ibsee. Special Services had requisitioned German resort hotels for the GIs. I was surprised how much I enjoyed eating at a table covered with white linen and set with beautiful flowers, porcelain, and heavy silver. I liked the soft music and being waited on. It was like being rich. In Provo I had not had such privileges.

On Saturdays I went to the Barter Market with Castle. I had begun to send home for cases of coffee and cigarettes to trade for points. I

wanted a *Leica*, a pair of *Zeiss* binoculars for hunting, *Meissen* and *Rosenthal* porcelain, and rings of gold. At first I felt guilty trading with cigarettes and coffee because of the Word of Wisdom, and because I thought it was taking advantage of the Germans. Castle told me I was nuts. He said that was what the krauts wanted and to think of it as money. So I did.

I sent my beautiful possessions home in special wooden boxes made by the custodian in our office building. A wooden box cost a package of cigarettes.

After six months I had stopped reading the CID felony files. Seeing the big glossy black and white pictures of murder victims, the wounded bodies sometimes lying naked and uncovered on the table in the morgue, reading the words of victims of terrible crimes, the confessions of those who had never thought themselves capable of violence or incredible deceit, seeing their stunned photographed faces, I grew apprehensive. I didn't like knowing American soldiers could do such things to other people. I was glad I would be discharged in a year. I no longer wanted to go to West Point.

During the summer the section held picnics, not parties; but in the fall we began our parties again. And in the smoky *Gasthaus*, with the music and the loud talking, some of the German girlfriends seemed different, harder. In the thirty months the War had been over, many had moved from one GI to the next as GIs returned to the States for discharge or reassignment. These women would have followed any army.

A few of them still wanted to dance with me when they were told I was religious and didn't have a *Shatzie*. The girlfriends held me close, swinging me through the German polkas, laughing loudly, or they danced slowly, held me at arms' length and asked me questions in English about Provo and my family. The faint sour smell was gone; they had more soap now and better clothes. Some of them still said they had a nice young girlfriend, cousin, or sister who would like me for a boyfriend, but I always said no. And they always shook their heads.

"Why do you say no?" they asked. "It would be very nice for you, a young man. I have religion, too."

I shook my head. I could not explain to them that I needed to return home clean. I didn't know how to say it in my few words of German, and I was afraid they would laugh anyway. To be immoral would make me a different person, and going home could never be the same. I believed the people I loved, and who loved me, would somehow know I had changed.

At night lying in my bunk, my hands under my head, I still liked sometimes to close my eyes to imagine my discharge and return to Provo. I planned to surprise everybody, walk from the railroad station up Third West in the cool early evening, carrying my duffel bag. I knew who lived in every house. Just thinking about it made me very happy, imagining how happy everybody would be to see me. In her letters my mother said that friends in the Sixth Ward already asked when I would be coming home. She said she wouldn't be able to recognize me I would be so grown up.

The barracks were warm as my second German winter began, and the Germans had more food and coal. Looking down from my window at night, I saw fewer German women walking outside the fence. The GIs who had been in Germany since right after the end of the War said the good time was about over.

The cigarettes, coffee, soap, chocolate, and nylons were now not as important as they had been. The Germans weren't starving now. But a GI might still marry his girl and take her with him to the States. Nearly all of the girls wanted that desperately. The States were paradise for them, a land that offered all of the good things in life. Germany was still *kaput*, and men, either German or American, were in short supply. Every GI in the section still expected his *Fräulein* to be submissive, agreeable, able to speak English, and very appreciative.

The German women still told us that of the Russians, French, and English, we Americans were by far the best. We were kinder, more understanding, more like the Germans (they told us Eisenhower was a German name). We still did not ask questions about Hitler, the SS, the Nazis, or the death camps. Our main interest was our own pleasure, not political discussion.

A GI seldom talked to German men. There seemed to be more German men than there had been, but it was not necessary to talk to them. We needed nothing from them. GIs, because they wanted to be greatly needed and appreciated, liked the shortage of German men.

The attic of my barracks was filled with wooden German army lockers and wooden beds. One Saturday I searched through the lockers for a German name written on the wood, but I found none. I wanted to talk to a German soldier who had lived in the barracks. I wanted to walk through a German military cemetery, but I didn't know where one was. It was as if the German army had never existed. I wanted to know what it was like to be a German soldier. I still wished I spoke German, knew more than just the words all GIs knew, but it was too late to learn.

At the winter section parties I served at the bar now when everybody else was drunk. And I drove a weapons carrier to take the drunk GIs and their *Fräuleins* home. The women called to me to come too as they took out their heavy German keys to open the heavy German doors. And they repeated their earlier promises to find me a friend, the falling snow muffling the laughter that came from the hallway or alley. Shifting and letting up on the clutch, I drove the weapons carrier down the dark street leading through the piles of snow-covered rubble.

I went on furlough with Simmons to Garmisch to ski. And on Saturdays I went hunting deer and wild boar with Castle and others from the section. At Christmas I gave *Fräulein* Zoll two cartons of cigarettes, and she bought a goose and other food to fix a wonderful Christmas dinner for us and her mother. I was happy. I knew that next Christmas I would be home. I was eighteen, but I felt older and didn't know why. But I was glad I would not have to live my life in Germany.

In the spring I began going on the *Strassenbahn* all the way across Frankfurt to swim in a German indoor swimming pool. Although it had been requisitioned by Special Services, very few GIs swam there. A German diver ninety years old gave diving lessons to a group of German boys who were allowed to use the pool. I stood watching, and he invited me to take lessons. He had been an Olympic diver. I gave him a package of cigarettes after every lesson.

The boys were my age. I saw our reflection in the north window-wall. I knew that anyone seeing me standing in line in my black swimming trunks would think I was German too. All I needed to do was speak German and have my hair cut with the bottom of my sideburns slanted to a point. No one could tell by my body that I was an American, which seemed strange. I didn't wear my dog tags in swimming.

In April I turned nineteen. I was scheduled to return to the States in June for discharge. My mother in her letters said people kept asking when I would be home. I earned my sergeant's stripe, and Sylvia Hahn told me if I extended my enlistment for a year, I would easily make staff and even technical sergeant, but I was not seriously tempted. I was already full of the joy of being discharged and returning home. I wanted to live my dreams.

I went on furlough with Castle and another GI named Disbrow in Castle's car to Luxembourg to buy liquor. They got drunk, and in the hotel they pinned me down in bed and poured champagne into my mouth and made me drink it. I didn't get angry; it didn't seem important; I didn't feel any different.

I asked Castle to take me to the American military cemetery where General Patton was buried. I stood looking at the thousands of white markers, long row after row after row, as if the world were full of graves. The grass was very green. I said nothing. I wondered how many men from Provo were buried here. I walked alone along a long row reading the names. It seemed important to read aloud the name on every marker in the cemetery. Someone should do that every day. General Patton was buried under a simple white cross. I read his name.

Returning to Castle's car I stopped to look back at the white markers. It scared me to think so many men were dead. I wanted to kneel down on the green grass but not to pray, just to kneel, yet I did not.

The section toasted me at the last party before I left. All the German girls hugged me, and in the office Sylvia Hahn kissed me when I said good-bye. I sailed home on the *USS Ballou* and was discharged at Camp Kilmer.

I wore my uniform on the train trip home. I had a clean summer uniform I was going to change into before I got off the train in Provo and walk home up Third West carrying my duffel bag and surprise everybody. I had everything planned to the last detail, but the train was late. The older people who sat in the seats near me said I was a fine, clean looking young man and that America should be proud of soldiers like me.

For three days, and late into the nights, I sat in the domeliner to see the land pass as I returned West, started the climb back into the Rocky Mountains. Crossing the Colorado border into Utah I was so happy I was afraid I would jump up and start shouting. I kept looking at my watch; I hoped the train would make up some of the lost time. I shaved and put on my clean uniform. I sat at the window in the darkened car watching the dark canyon.

The train arrived in Provo four hours late. I got off and turned to watch the lights on the end of the last car disappear from sight. Nobody waved. The neighborhood boys were not playing ball in the streets; it was too late. I lifted my duffel bag to my shoulder and began to walk up Third West. The surrounding high black mountains stood above the trees.

I knew who lived in every house. I had planned for the people sitting on their front porches or out watering their lawns to call out greetings to me as I passed in the quiet evening, and for the men to come down and shake my hand and welcome me home. But it was too late;

everybody was asleep, the windows unlit. No voices called to me out of the darkness.

At the end of the first block I stopped and set down my duffel bag. All of the houses were dark. Only the corner street lamps gave light. I stood there a long time looking up Third West. I didn't move. Something had changed. I had never expected anything would be different once I got home to Provo.

It wasn't until a week or two later, all the welcomes over, that I knew what had changed. Quite suddenly it came into my mind one evening that Provo could lie in ruins, the houses all rubble. My brothers, my uncles, my friends from school, could be prisoners, missing, wounded, or dead. Provo could be mostly a city of starving and freezing old people, children, and women. And the young women would trade the use of their bodies for chocolate, soap, cookies, canned food, and perhaps cigarettes. When that came into my mind, I knew finally what had happened. Germany had changed my imagination.

Strangers

Out of the north they came, strangers
with animals we'd never seen, stores
of exotic foods, seeds to plant in the spring.
Their clothes were light, delicate colors
of earth and sky, like their eyes. We tried
to be friendly, to learn their ways.
Where had they been those years we mastered
the art of trade, the pleasures of war?
But our words brought only bewilderment.
We don't understand, their fingers seemed to say.
At last their leader opened his arms.
"We are brothers," he said, as he turned away.

—Donnell Hunter

The Second Time

The second time Lazarus went
down in the dark he held no fear,
having out-lived both sisters
who married well and widowed young,
leaving him to tend the olive trees
of Bethany alone. October wind lost
its voice. Leaves turned their backs
to the sun, and a whisper called
from the other side of home.

—Donnell Hunter

Welfare Farm Raisins

The elders unite as the waking sun crisps
over the vineyard's eternal rows
striping the earth's fertile wrinkle.

Some christen pruning as art:
their crescent blades seeking buds
to sacrifice like heavy thighs.

Others just follow the formula:
Cut five canes the length of shears.
Keep six spurs with four buds.

The canes creak when wound around wires
but soon sprout their corkscrews
to shoulder the harvest.

Before the vines sour in summer,
the elders return to snip off the clumps
and offer the grapes to the San Joaquin sun.

—Brian J. Fogg

Book Reviews

Healing the Streams: A review of Salvador by Margaret Blair Young (Aspen Books, 1992, paperback, \$9.95). Reviewed by Karla Bennion, Ph.D. student in the Clinical Psychology Department at BYU, and John Bennion, Assistant Professor of English at BYU.

Isaac Bashevis Singer writes in his autobiography, *A Young Man in Search of Love*, that early Yiddish writers were either traditional and sentimental or agnostic and cynical. His own writing included both mysticism and sexuality; as a result he offended both factions by violating their conventions of legitimate human experience. Decades ago William Mulder said that this same split limits Mormon fiction; writers either abandon their cultural and spiritual heritage or they are so apologetic that they cannot judge objectively. Even today few writers draw from the full range of Mormon experience. Margaret Blair Young is one of the few.

In *Salvador*, Young's third book length work of fiction, she invents a first person narrator who heals the split by ignoring it. The narrator is naive and sarcastic, sensual and spiritual, faithful and doubtful; she is whole and complete because of these contradictions in her personality. *Salvador* is the story of a woman in transition, one who is trying to redefine her relationship to her body, her God, and her cultural heritage. The book also examines the seductiveness of posing as a savior, setting oneself up as an intermediary between other humans and God.

Seeking a place to heal the wounds received during her disastrous marriage, Julie Albertson travels from Orem, Utah, to her Uncle Johnny's plantation in the jungle of El Salvador. Her voice is ironic, a shield against her recent misfortune: "I said that there was nowhere I'd

rather finalize my divorce than in a war zone." As happens with many abused Mormon women, she had thought that she could work a miracle and save her deranged husband, and so remained with him too long. She realizes now that she was pressed into marriage by the expectations of her mother and her culture. Of her early self-concept, she says, "I wanted to have lots of kids and raise them Mormon, in Utah, the way Mom had raised us. I wanted to make my home a haven of silliness. I wanted to be everything Mom wanted me to be—and she came from the best dreamers and idealists and religious fanatics this side of California." The consequence of her idealistic view of marriage is emotional injury, serious physical illness, guilt, and loss of identity. At the end of the marriage her husband says to her: "I wish I could push you out of the car. . . . Push you out and watch you writhe to death. That would give me great pleasure."

She will divorce him, but that rejection of her past cannot teach her who she will become. Will she see herself as a failed woman, because she can no longer give her husband succor? Is she Digs, the daughter of her essentially traditional mother? Is she Feather Butt or Freckle Face, as she was called in junior high, or the Cornflower Angel, the name given her by a Salvadorian friend? Has she been called to be a savior to the native people, as her Uncle Johnny says?

Instead of easy resolutions in the jungle of El Salvador, she finds a religious commune patterned after the United Order, *terroristas*, revolutionaries, murder, secret sacred ruins, jaguars, Edenic waterfalls and ravines filled with hand-sized butterflies, air filled with the aroma of gardenias, hibiscus, and pine. She also finds a passionate, Shakespeare-quoting Salvadorian, who helps her forget her past injuries. In the jungle the violence, religious fervor, and sensuality by which she has previously defined herself grow even wilder—verdant and exotic.

In addition to the voice of her wacky, optimistic mother, who tells Julie she can do anything, and the voice of Alberto, her passionate friend, Julie has three other people who influence her as she relearns how to exist. They are all former missionaries to El Salvador, and each has followed a different vision. Her father, an excommunicated Vietnam vet, is the voice of rational humanism and doubt. Her mother's brother, Johnny, sees himself as a savior to the natives; he is the charismatic voice of mysticism. (The parallels between Johnny and Joseph Smith are remarkable and disturbing.) The materialistic district president, Dave Piggot, wants the Salvadorians to become mini-American capitalists and suburbanites. His is the voice of ecclesiastical authority.

All are seductive voices, all want her to act according to their own vision of the universe. Julie has come to be healed, to find out who she is, as she does so she must learn to discern between these voices, judging what is sound and mature in them and what is fraudulent.

Salvador is an experimental blend of genres—the secular and serious, the mystery story, and the faithful romance—and some of its devices are not yet smooth.

The narrative requires that readers learn only what the central character learns, moment to moment. A confident and delicate touch is required to portray this kind of limited viewpoint without also limiting the scope of the book; the character-narrator may have biases and blind spots, but the author should not. In three areas this distinction does not come clearly across. The characters occasionally use the word "communist" as if it were the ultimate evil, synonymous with apostasy, if not worse. Even North American Mormons, after working for years among the people in Central America, would not likely conceive of the political situation there in such simplistic, black-and-white terms. Secondly, in describing physical affection or sexual attraction, the story often reverts to a sort of romance novel rhetoric which can be disconcerting; the narrator may construe sexual situations in these terms, but the reader is left unsure if such language comes from the character or from the character's author. Lastly, the narrator's confusion about her relationship to revelation, priesthood, and the institutional Church comes across as perhaps the author's confusion as well. Of course it is a tall order to demand that the author have worked out her own attitudes toward revolutionary third-world politics, sex, and the complexities of the Mormon religion before she tackles writing a novel. Indeed, the ambiguities and tensions of unresolved conflicts generate a lot of energy in this story.

Another effect, perhaps arising from the romance novel aspect of *Salvador*, is that the protagonist is passive, one to whom things happen. She goes along with her parents to El Salvador; she has remained in an abusive relationship. She does try to transform herself by working—the traditionally masculine way of defining self. "I didn't care so much about looks anymore," she says. "I wanted to work. . . . Work, I had heard, was the best therapy for people in transition." And she works hard, but she doesn't significantly change in the central events of the novel. Men are the prime movers here. The narrator is a watcher, and the action is to that extent external, separate from her personal drama.

In the front pages of *Salvador* Eugene England is quoted as saying, "She hasn't written the great Mormon novel—yet, but here she shows the way." Some of her best inventions may bother members of both sides of the current split in Mormon literature. The sometimes flip tone may bother some and the book's probing of serious questions (which are often left unanswered) may offend others. Some may want sexuality which is more fully expressed; some may think that even the teasing that the book contains is too much. It is a pioneering work, and Young is the next writer in a limited tradition of Mormons who have labored to heal the divided stream.

A New Voice: A Review of Thoughts of a Grasshopper: Essays and Oddities by Louise Plummer (Deseret Book, 1992, Hardcover, \$10.95). Reviewed by Valerie Holladay, a freelance editor living in Provo, UT.

As a former (and very satisfied) student in Louise Plummer's creative writing class, I was pleased by her publication *Thoughts of a Grasshopper: Essays and Oddities*. As a personal essayist, I was glad to see a collection of essays—one of the first and one of the few—published within the Mormon community. And as a caring and involved Mormon who nevertheless finds herself "at odds" with many aspects of her church, I was comforted by many of her essays and "oddities," which include several church talks I would have been glad to listen to, even to give. In addition Louise includes a chapter of an adolescent novel, a letter to a friend, and a written musical audition—an odd collection, but overall, a happy ensemble by a new voice in the Mormon market.

To be honest, the title didn't do much for me but I felt better when I read the title essay. A grasshopper, according to Aesop's fable, fiddled the summer away while good ants did their food storage (and no doubt their home teaching and genealogy). However, when winter came the grasshopper pled with the ants for food. Disney was kinder to the grasshopper than Aesop; in the cartoon the ants rebuke the grasshopper, but then feed him, whereas in the fable the ants only stolidly remind the grasshopper of the natural consequences of fiddling around all summer instead of working as they have done.

To be a grasshopper, says Louise, is almost antithetical to being a member of an ant-church, which praises preparation, organization, and self-discipline. An ant cooks wholesome food (i.e., homemade,

wheat-from-storage-ground bread), folds socks in the drawer, even irons underclothing (as did her Dutch-born mother). A grasshopper, on the other hand, can make a list of nearly 50 items found under one's bed, including books, silverware, popsicle sticks, orange peelings, scissors, darts, hangers, and disposable razors. Says Louise, "I've always wondered if there was room in a family of ants for a grasshopper, room in a community of ants for a grasshopper, or room in a church of ants for a grasshopper. My discomfort, I believe, comes from my fear of disapproval, my fear that ants will not accept me unless I am just like them."

Louise had read some of her writing in class, and as I read her essays I heard her exceptional storytelling voice, which she is quick to point out, is her prime goal in writing—"to tell a compelling story"—not necessarily a truthful one. In fact, in her first essay (or oddity, whichever category it falls under) called "First Things First," she tells a story about breeding her dog (because children were long in coming). It's a fun, clever story "compelling" even, but Louise has a second purpose to this story—to clear up misconceptions readers might have about her essays being strictly "true." When her husband confronted her with the reality that she had not been present at the incident that she was describing to dinner guests in great detail, she learned for the first time "that for [her] the line between reality and fiction is blurred. [Her] fiction is made up of autobiographical details" and "[her] nonfiction (the *true* stories) are filled with little fictions." To create a visual picture, lots of details are needed, details that may have been forgotten and that frankly don't matter to the truth of the story but that do matter to the telling of the story.

Not many people would have the guts to publish their church talks (nor would we want them to). Louise has included several thought-provoking talks, including a talk given at her son's missionary farewell and one given at an Easter service, and a third given at a stake conference on strengthening the family. In the latter she makes quick work of facile answers to building family-ness—answers too often given as the end-all to all problems, answers like "pray together, hold family home evening, and read your scriptures." Few women, I believe, would have the courage admit to the entire ward that their son had tried to strangle them, that they had decided to leave home and its problems to their husbands to solve. Even more, few women would have Louise's imaginative "escape plan": to take a Greyhound bus to the middle of South Dakota to spend the rest of her life working

as a waitress in an inconspicuous diner. But to strengthen a family means that "when every cell inside us wants to leave and become a waitress in South Dakota, we go home and try again. Sometimes, on the other hand, strengthening the family means leaving"—startling and necessary advice in a Church talk and a Church book, which I believe many need to hear.

My favorite part of her book was her essay for would-be journal keepers called "The 5-minutes-a-day-journal." She gives samples of her own writing as well as that of her students, along with a killer essay on "saliva sisters" guaranteed to curdle any reader's stomach. Frustrated personal historians may find comfort in her ideas for lists (like her list of items under her bed) as a means of recording their lives. Some of her ideas include writing a list of everything in your wallet or everything in your fridge, a list of all your teachers or of everyone you've ever loved, or a list beginning "How my life would be different if [I hadn't joined the Church, had married so-and-so, hadn't married so-and-so, if I won the Publisher's Clearing House sweepstakes, etc.]."

I had a hard time finishing this review because I kept lending Louise's book friends. I'm pleased that Deseret Book is publishing this kind of writing; first, it shows an acceptance of the essay as a legitimate and useful form of writing, and second, it shows an acceptance of the kind of honesty we need more of in the Church—honesty about imperfections, about negative emotions (especially in regards to family and family members), and about ourselves as human beings struggling to work out our salvation.

Overall I see Louise's book as a landmark publication and a sample of Mormon essay writing (and Church talk giving) at its best, and yet at the same time, her collection is uneven. While her "Kissy Kissy Christmas" is a fun essay about a first kiss, "A Christmas Romance" needs an introduction to explain it isn't an essay but rather a chapter from an adolescent novel. (One reader told me how startled she was to find the narrator named Kate, not Louise.) One "oddity," a written audition to sing in a choir (a must-read) shows Louise at her witty best, while another "oddity," a letter to a friend, invites a "What is this doing here?" response, which could be alleviated with a brief introduction to explain how a letter is a way of keeping one's journal. While I felt her essay on her grandmother, "Oma" did not go deep enough, a friend was deeply impressed by Louise's "courage" in admitting that she had called her grandmother to her face "a stupid woman." "Wall-

flower," a monologue of a young girl at a dance, reminded me of Dorothy Parker's "The Waltz," but unfortunately it didn't measure up.

Thoughts of a Grasshopper: Essays and Oddities is a book well worth reading. I'd even hunt down Louise's adolescent novels and give them to young female readers. I'll look forward to her next collection of essays. I'll continue to recommend and to lend this book to all my friends—and more importantly—I'll be sure to get it back.

Criticism to Guide Our Shakespeares and Miltons: A Review of Talents and Technicians: Literary Chic and the New Assembly-line Fiction by John W. Aldridge. (New York: Scribner's, 1992. Hardcover, \$18.00). Reviewed by Mark Edward Koltko, a writer and psychotherapist who practices in New York City and New Jersey.

A couple of years ago at the closing dinner of the Sunstone Symposium, I was arguing with a young writer. She was then enrolled in a masters degree program in creative writing at a university in the West. Her fiction had been awarded a prize in an earlier Brown competition. I had three stories under consideration for the prose to be awarded that very evening, and it was natural that we fall into conversation about the writers we admired. My problem, and the centerpiece of my argument, was that I found it difficult to admire much, at least among the more celebrated writers of my generation. Too often, their writing was artful but pointless, directionless, with nothing to say and less to teach me about people and life other than that sometimes existence seemed pointless and directionless—a lesson that I did not think required so much repetition.

It was not that the writer disagreed with me. On the contrary, she went on to name people like Bobbie Ann Mason and Ann Beattie and Raymond Carver who embodied my very complaints. What my dinner companion had to say, though, was that my complaints were essentially outmoded: styles had changed. I felt that the intended implication was that I could either go with the flow or be left in literary backwaters.

It was months later, after my stories had lost the competition and I had lost the writer's name, that I came upon an essay called "The New Assembly-line Fiction" in the *American Scholar*. I felt that I had finally found someone who put my dispute with so much of contemporary literature into the terms of a well-informed, plainly-written critical

analysis. This essay now forms the first chapter in John W. Aldridge's new book, *Talents and Technicians*. It is a book that not only has much to say about the state of contemporary literature, but that also has an implicit message for Latter-day Saint writers in particular.

One can tell that Aldridge, a literary critic and professor of English at the University of Michigan, is not concerned with losing friends. He skewers the whole apparatus of programs in creative writing, prominent book reviewers, and a dozen celebrated contemporary writers, from the late Raymond Carver to Bret Easton Ellis. But Aldridge does not engage in bashing younger contemporaries merely because they are young and contemporary. He explains his positions carefully, passionately, with vigor and insight, in prose crafted for the general reading public rather than an audience of specialists.

Aldridge's theses are straightforward but disturbing. The central problem with the fiction of the most prominent and celebrated new writers is that it is based on a kind of fashionable spiritual vacuum, what Madison Bell has termed "polite nihilism," in reference to the position that life is meaningless, morality is purely conventional, and, in effect, there is nothing in the world worth getting worked up about.

This effect of nihilism is, in fact, the one element with the stories not only of Beattie but of Carver and the others that leaves any kind of clear impression on the mind. They seem consistently to suggest that human life in general and human experience in particular do not count for very much of anything and are equally consignable to oblivion. (32)

It is this nihilism that results in fiction that is emotionally flat, populated with depthless characters who act, sometimes bizarrely, on random impulse rather than on motive. (If nothing matters, why bother with such quaint concepts as passion and will?) This is why we can come away from some writers knowing more about the designer clothing that their characters wear than we do about what is going on in their characters' souls: in a world where nothing matters, matter is everything, especially matter that can be packaged and sold at terrific markup.

Aldridge places the blame for these literary faults on the spiritual barrenness of modern society in general, and on the widespread creative writing workshop teaching method in particular. He skimps on the larger issue, to which I will return later, but he is wonderfully detailed concerning the latter.

The sins of the creative writing workshop are several and serious, in Aldridge's view. Prominent among these is something built into the

very structure of a workshop: writing that is "different," quirky, or downright individual is often worn down in the workshop process into something like what everyone else is doing. In addition, the obscure pettiness of much current writing—the tendency to write about portentous circumstances that never conclude in a dramatic climax or personal epiphany—may have its roots in creative writing programs.

[Contemporary writers may have] learned in the MFA writing programs that very often when such underdone fiction was presented during a workshop session, the students assumed that a profound meaning was contained somewhere within it but they were too stupid to perceive it. . . . Thus, failure to achieve meaning becomes widely and enthusiastically recognized by the timid as extreme subtlety of meaning. (48)

Another problem with writing programs, Aldridge says, is that they tend to create an insular culture of hothouse writers who write, not for the general public, but for other writers who have also graduated from writing programs, and who work at universities teaching even younger writers how to write. (Aldridge here independently echoes concerns raised in Ben Satterfield's superb essay "Break the Circle" in *Poets and Writers*, March/April 1992, to which the reader is referred for further critiques made about writing programs.)

It is unfortunate that Aldridge (again, much like Satterfield) puts all writing programs under one umbrella and damns them all uniformly and totally. It seems that there are some programs that do offer instruction in writing rather than conducting one big game of show-and-tell. In addition, as a recent article in *Lingua franca* pointed out, writing programs can be helpful in providing a young writer with the opportunity to focus on writing and writing alone. There is a point to a hothouse. However, given the current almost exclusive focus in the magazines and journals and literary publishing houses on the publication of MFA graduates, Aldridge provides a welcome warning voice about the direction that literature has taken.

As I mentioned earlier, Aldridge skimps when it comes to describing the larger societal forces that have promoted the emotionally anorexic literature that he criticizes so. He does cite Christopher Lasch's observations:

Contemporary lives consist of "isolated acts and events." They have "no story, no pattern, no structure as an unfolding narrative." Therefore, a literature that seeks to reflect those

lives accurately will have as its defining features "an immersion in the ordinary . . . an insistence on the random quality of experience." (42)

Perhaps it is this factor, the spiritual vacuum in modern American society at large, that is most to blame for the spiritual emptiness underlying so much of contemporary literature. It is at this point that Latter-day Saints have perhaps their strongest opportunity to make a distinctive contribution to world literature, to take on the roles of modern "Shakespeares and Miltons," which Brigham Young predicted would occur.

Perhaps the strongest difference between the world view of Mormonism and that expressed in most contemporary literature regards the matter of meaning and purpose. As Aldridge sees it, the most celebrated literature of our day expresses a thoroughgoing nihilism. Nothing could be further from the heart of Mormonism: life not only has meaning and purpose, but each *individual's* life has cosmic meaning and eternal purpose. Expressing what it is to live an intelligent life in the modern world in the light of such a perspective may be the most important contribution that the Latter-day Saints have to make to what used to be called The Great Conversation.

Aldridge also points out a consequence of the nihilism that pervades much modern fiction. The same thing, Aldridge says of Carver, can be said of a good deal of fiction:

There is also an air of bleakness about these stories that appears to be the result not only of a darkly negative vision of life but of a certain poverty of imagination. . . . [The minimalist style of these stories is] the verbal index perhaps of some deeply lodged visceral conviction that there is very little of any worth to be said about the sorry state of human existence. (56)

Thus, a lack of meaning leads to a shortage of imagination in the expression of that meaninglessness. The implication here is that a fiction regarding ultimate meaning deserves the highest forms of imaginatively creative treatment, and this is precisely what Aldridge finds in the work of the post-Lost Generation authors whom he most praises in this volume, authors like Don DeLillo, William Gaddis, Thomas Pynchon, Norman Mailer, Kurt Vonnegut, and Joseph Heller. These writers are known for taking great risks in terms of style, content, and language. It is to these giants, who are anything but timid in their writing style, that LDS writers might most appropriately look for role models. As Aldridge points out, most of these writers, at least in some

BOOK REVIEWS

of their books, have used the language of cosmic or mystical vision; this may be more appropriate a model for Mormon writers than the simple, fashionable, and often-seen slice-of-life domestic tragicomedy.

This is emphatically not to say that LDS writers should occupy themselves with proselytizing or promoting faith as an overt aim in their writing. I am reminded of Nadine Gordimer's 1991 Nobel acceptance speech, where she quoted both Camus and Márquez. From the former, she noted that "he said that he liked individuals who take sides more than literatures that do"; from the latter, she recited that "the best way a writer can serve a revolution is to write as well as he can."

Mormonism is a revolution, make no mistake about it; it deserves the best writing of which we are capable to depict it in all its multifaceted mystery and beauty. It has long been recognized by a small but growing number of LDS writers that we do not have to abandon the field to official pronouncements, public relations communiqués, or missionary pamphlets. The message that Aldridge leaves for us is that LDS writers should not take as models the nihilistic writings of our most celebrated contemporaries. We are going to have to invent our own models—and that is all as it should be.

In sum, this book is an excellent critique of the state of current literature and the writing of some of our most celebrated writers, written for the intelligent but nonspecialist reader. It will be of interest to anyone who writes, and to anyone who is curious about contemporary literature, whether or not they are already familiar with the writers whom Aldridge mentions. I just wish I could find the name of my dining companion from that awards dinner, so that I could recommend it to her.